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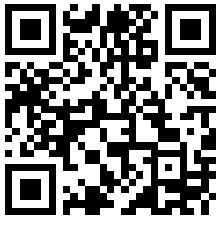

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THE DASHING GIRLS OF LONDON;

OR,

THE SIX BEAUTIES OF ST. JAMES'S.

BY LADY MAUDE ANNESLEY.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:
HENRY LEA, 112, FLEET STREET, E.C.
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THE DASHING GIRLS OF LONDON;

OR,

THE SIX BEAUTIES OF ST. JAMES'S.

ALICE ABSTRACTING THE LETTER FROM THE BOUQUET.

CHAPTER I.

THE RACE COURSE AT NEWMARKET—HEAVY BETTING—THE SPORTING MAN'S SIX BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS—THE RICH BARONET AND THE POOR LIEUTENANT—LOVE AGAINST FORTUNE—THE RACE—THE MISHAP OF THE FAVOURITE.

It was a prime morning for the races; so said the betting men, whether the professional gamblers of the turf, or the Jews and stock-jobbers and raffish noblemen, or the merchants and lawyers, and other business men, who should have had something better to do both with their time and their money than to squander either at the Newmarket races.

Shows and horse-racing are an especial madness of the English, who seem to shake off their national sluggishness and become as animated as their continental neighbours when once they set foot on the turf, or becom-

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ensnared by its dangerous attractions. Since the judges said it was a prime morning, a prime morning no doubt it was: the ground was firm without being dusty, and some thin grey clouds, more prophetic of heat than rain, prevented an undue glare of the sun.

London, more than fifty years ago, in the days of the reign of George the Third, the days of stage-coaches and oil-lamps, was probably not more than a fifth of its present size. The number of persons composing the great little world of fashion has been at all times pretty nearly the same, and a most brilliant assemblage there was on the race course of Newmarket on that spring morning of the 17th——.

The Prince was on the royal stand. The Prince always patronised Newmarket, he was a great sporting man; and some stiff-necked people there were who spitefully whispered that the sporting transactions of his Royal Highness were not always to his credit, "first gentleman in Europe" though he was.

"What a devilish lucky fellow is that Tom Amry; he has the finest dogs, the finest horses, and the finest daughters in the country. I take it now to be demnition hard that one fellow should have such lots of luck and another fellow no luck at all!"

These remarks were made in a drawling tone by an exquisite of the London foppington class, who was lounging near the royal stand with a thickly-built man somewhat above the middle height, and apparently some ten years his senior, as the fop might have been about five and twenty years of age, while five and thirty summers and winters too had passed over the head of his companion, and laid rather a heavy hand on him in their flight, as was evidenced by some deep furrows on the brow and more than one silver streak amid his dark hair. Those furrows, too, would not have been adjudged by a clever physiognomist to be merely the result of such a career of folly and reckless dissipation as that on which the younger man, Lord Annesley, was just entering. There was deep thought on Sir Miles Cressingham's brow, and more than the anxiety of the mere man-about-town pestered with creditors in the lines about the haggard mouth. In spite of this, however, Sir Miles was called handsome by some people, and must have been acknowledged as an imposing aristocratic-looking man by every body.

He had not been born to the baronetcy and fine estate, he now enjoyed; his path had been one of toil and privation, that must have been especially bitter to a man of his haughty temper and luxurious tastes. He had passed many years in Italy, where, when he had no prospect save of supporting himself by his own exertions, he had studied the science of medicine, but became so absorbed in all that related to chemistry, that he would have stood a poor chance, as a general practitioner, if the decease of his distant cousin had not released him from the struggle for bread to place him in possession of a handsome fortune.

During the period of his distress, Sir Miles had, according to the custom of poor men, possessed himself of a wife to increase his embarrassment, and a very miserable life the poor woman had after his fancy for her pretty face had worn out, and the man who had married her for what he called love got so thoroughly to hate her, that he considered her death, a few months after that of his cousin's, as an equal piece of good fortune for him.

Whatever under-current of dark and bad might be in the character of Sir Miles Cressingham, his manners were those of a most accomplished gentleman.

He could take the tone of any society in which he found himself, he kept company with all the wits of the day; though dissolute, he was never coarse; and though a favourite guest at Carlton house, and known to be a frequent sharer in the wild orgies of the Prince Regent, Sir Miles was so unexceptionable in his general demeanour that he was equally welcomed to the entertainment of even the most cautious and prudish of mothers in the world of fashion. Sir Miles was so rich, so liberal, and so elegant in his tastes, that he was sought after by old and young; and if any meddling and spiteful persons whispered a word to his disadvantage—if a lady was the speaker, it would be assumed that either for herself or some female relation she had spread a snare which Sir Miles had escaped; and if the detractor were of his own sex, well it was known that Sir Miles was a dead shot, that he could split a bullet at sixty paces, and that in his small sword practice he had come off the conqueror in a trial of skill with the most renowned masters of fencing in Padua and Paris.

The young Lord Annesley, the companion of Sir Miles on the race course at Newmarket, very much affected the baronet's society. Lord Annesley was a satire on hereditary law-givers, a burlesque on his order, the most vapid and silly lordling that ever figured in the pages of a novelist was not more silly than he.

Lord Annesley was very anxious to be admitted among the Regent's associates, but his Royal Highness liked people who had some vivacity in their revels, and who could amuse him, and poor Lord Annesley was very dull, so he made but little progress in the good graces of the Prince. The acute Sir Miles, however, soon found that the young man's dullness confused him at the card table, that it was the easiest thing in the world to cheat him; and that even when he lost his money he did not lose his temper, an idiosyncracy which greatly diverted the Prince and his companions, who forthwith, on the recommendation of Sir Miles, admitted the foolish youth to their parties on gambling sufferance.

Sir Miles was a connoiseur on the turf, though he seldom betted heavily, and never ran a horse himself.

"Well, as I was saying," vapidly pursued Lord Annesley, setting his eyes on a barouche full of ladies which had just drawn up near the course, "that Amery is a downright lucky fellow. What beautiful girls those daughters of his are, and such different styles, too, that 'pon honour one would not know how to choose among them. There they are. By Jove! that barouche of old Amery's looks like a flower-bed all full of different sorts of flowers,—eh! eh! eh!"

It is to be supposed that his lordship laughed in admiration of his own very original and poetical simile.

"Yes," replied Sir Miles, carelessly switching his boot with a riding-whip he held in his hand, "Amery's daughters are fine women; but I doubt whether they will be any great catch in point of money."

"Why, their father is furiously rich, is he not?" said Lord Annesley.

"He lives at a high rate," returned Sir Miles, "but who knows how he will cut up, to use a city phrase."

"My dear Cressingham, he is very rich," persisted Lord Annesley; "why, confound the fellow! he is so demnition lucky he always wins on the course. Why, the oldest hands among the knowing ones are laying twenty to one on Amery's mare, Iphigenia, at this moment. Why, she is a prime favourite—she's sure to win, isn't she, Cressingham?"

"My dear fellow," answered Sir Miles, "have you never heard that there is nothing sure in this world save death and quarter-day? I hope Iphigenia will win, for I suspect Amery has booked heavily on her, and will be terribly dipped if she loses."

"Oh, no doubt of her winning; I have backed her for fifteen hundred myself!" said Lord Annesley, with a little more vivacity of manner than he had hitherto shown

"Nay; if your lordship has backed her, no doubt she is the winner!" said Sir Miles, with so palpable a sneer that it would have been perceived by any person less obtuse than Lord Annesley; his lordship, however, did not notice it, and went on in his usual vapid strain.

"Well, to say the truth, Cressingham, I don't care much for the turf: what a horrid noise there is!" and his lordship put his delicately gloved hands to his ears. "But then, one must be in the fashion, even though the fashion is often a bore! What houries are those Amery girls. So long as it is the mode to admire them I shall not find that a bore. But, Cressingham, to be friendly now, intro-

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duced me to Amery's daughters, I knew your privileges in that quarter. I can tell you that it was said that the magnificent queen of beauty, Miss Alice, would seduce you into matrimony. She is a splendid creature, but I should prefer that lilly of the valley who was pointed out to me as her sister Florence."

"Truly!" answered Sir Miles, with a sneer, "it would be doubtful wisdom to be the first to wed one of Amery's daughters; think of the five sisters-in-law, my dear fellow. But come, the horses will be at the starting-post soon, and I promised old Amery to join him; he seems strangely nervous this morning, so in the interim I will present you to the girls."

As Sir Miles spoke, he elbowed his way with Lord Annesley through the miscellaneous crowd that filled every nook of ground near the race course. There were vendors of ginger-bread nuts and ginger beer, pedlars with gay ribands and gaudy shawls, and itinerant hawkers of cheap jewellery, composed of coloured glass set in pinchbeck and very much coarser in their construction than similar ware in the present day. The gaudy trumpery, however, whether of wearing apparel or trinkets, greatly fascinated the bumpkins of Cambridgeshire and their lasses, who had made a holiday to visit the races; and, pending the appearance of the horses, the pedlars and hawkers drove a good trade, almost as good as the thimble rig. The gipsey, too, who even in these days of railroads and enlightenment, still makes her appearance at the fairs and races, was in the full exercise of her calling fifty years ago, when George Prince of Wales was Regent of the British empire, and promised every girl who would listen to her a rich husband and a family of twelve children.

The beautiful daughters of Mr. Amery, the great sporting speculator, were always the cynosure of male optics whenever they appeared. A crowd of gentlemen had surrounded the barouche the moment that it drew up.

The beauty of that fair bevy of sisters has seldom been surpassed, and it was the more effective from the total difference in their style. There were blue eyes and black ones, and soft expressive grey and melting hazel; hair, too, that had caught its hue from the sunbeams, the raven's wing, or the ripe chesnut. The soft and languid blonde, the sparkling brunette, the houri, whose voluptuous charms befitted the Paradise of Muhammad, the sylph-like form and sweet pensive countenance worthy of a Christian saint, were all to be seen among the daughters of Mr. Amery; and yet, despite this rare beauty and their father's reported wealth, these young ladies had respectively blazed in the London world of fashion for periods verging from two to five seasons, and not one of them had as yet figured as a bride.

Alice, the eldest daughter of Amery, was a very Juno in form and feature; but the fear of a life of celibacy, so dreadful to a vain and frivolous woman, and Alice was both, was beginning to steal upon her, for she had entered her twenty-eighth year.

Perhaps the Amery girls were difficult to please; perhaps the multitude of butterflies of fashion, who hovered round them, kept at a distance more honourable and earnest men.

Perhaps it sometimes happens, in the upper as in the middle and humble walks of life, that great personal beauty is, though its owner may be perfectly amiable and unaffected, rather a hindrance to marriage. Certainly, in all classes of society, the most homely women are to be found in the married state, very often without any excellence of temper and manner to compensate for the absence of personal attraction. We think this apparently strange fact is to be accounted for by a certain jealousy and narrow mindedness, on the part of the Lords of the creation. They think they are so secure of an ugly woman, none of their own sex, they flatter themselves, will interfere between them and the precious creature.

They are herein very much deceived. The difference is one they seldom think of, namely, that the men make love to a pretty woman, and an ugly woman makes love to the men; and this, we fear, is the reason that so many pretty women remain unmarried: they feel their own value, expect to be wooed, and "will not unsought be won!"

The great aim of the juggernaut of fashion is to crush down every natural emotion: to make hate and love and joy and sorrow, mere words without a meaning for their blind worshippers. In dull apathetic persons this "don't-care-for-anything" repose of manner is easily acquired, because their feelings, never very lively, become utterly annihilated. But there are others, and of this class was Alice, the eldest daughter of Mr. Amery, in whom their natural emotions are hidden not subdued: some who would give half a lifetime to be permitted to weep or laugh, to be glad or sorry, as earnestly as any of the *canaille* whom they have been taught from their childhood to despise.

Such as these endure torture behind a mask, wear a smile on the lip while the heart weeps its tears of blood.

Oh! who would have thought as the full coral lips of Alice Amery, parted in a fascinating smile, discovering the twin rows of pearl within as she returned the salutation of Sir Miles Cressingham, that frowns and tears would have been the fitting interpreters of what she felt; that for those honied words of welcome, she would have launched at him the bitterest maledictions. That she could have sprung upon him and torn him, as the terrible tigress tears her prey; that in her fury it seemed to her, that no delight would be so maddening as that of beholding Sir Miles stretched a corpse at her feet, and by her own hand.

It was the frenzy of a scorned and injured woman that whispered in the breast of Alice Amery these terrible wishes; but could she have beheld their fulfillment, could she really have seen Sir Miles lying dead before her, then, true woman that she was in her strength of weakness, she would have gathered the corpse to her breast exulting in the thought that she had no rival now, and would have died herself in her agony of loving sorrow.

But the softness of the gazelle, not the wild rage of the tigress, beamed in the beautiful black eyes of Alice, as she leaned over the side of her father's carriage and chatted familiarly with Sir Miles, occasionally vouchsafing a word or two to Lord Annesley. Alice Amery seemed wholly occupied in her small talk with Sir Miles, and the keenest observers would not have detected any deceit in the seemingly careless glance which she occasionally cast at her sister Florence, a lovely girl of seventeen, whose sylph-like form, lustrous hazel eyes, and delicate Madonna face, with the silky chesnut hair folded so smoothly round the pure brows, presented the utmost possible contrast to the shower of ebon curls, full black eyes, and imposing beauty of form and feature, that distinguished Alice. There was what the actors would have called some capital bye-play between Alice and Florence that moment. The young girl was leaning back, and, seemingly, scarce conscious of the passing scene; but her sister was perfectly aware that she was observing every look and action of the military officer, who, in the somewhat stiff regimentals of the day, was bargaining for flowers with a girl whose merchandize of bouquets were at a premium, as she had been selling them at the doors of the carriages as well as among the persons on foot.

The officer, who was a remarkably handsome young man, about the same age as Lord Annesley, held a bunch of lillies of the valley in his hand for a moment; then he laid it down and took up a rose. As he did so, the somewhat pale cheek of Florence flushed to the rich hue of the flower, as she caught the momentary but meaning glance of her sister fixed upon her face.

"Oh!" mentally ejaculated Alice. "This girl, this baby, has robbed me of the love of the only man I ever cared for, and she cares not for the treasure she has won,—her fancy is caught by Herbert Mandeville. I cannot impeach her taste; if I had not loved Cressingham I might have loved that young soldier, who is signalling to Florence with the flowers. But, shall she be happy after doing so much to make me wretched? No! I will punish her for having won the heart of Cressingham, as though

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she had sought to win it. If my lot in life is to be a miserable one, she shall share my suffering!"

Even while these bitter thoughts passed through the mind of Alice Amery, she maintained an appearance of light-heartedness, and continued chatting gaily with Sir Miles. Presently the flower girl approached the barouche; Florence was on the near side to where the girl had made her bargain with Herbert Mandeville, Alice sat next to the course.

The flower girl held a bunch of lillies of the valley and roses which she offered to Florence, who laid the flowers in her lap while she took out her purse to pay for them; when immediately Alice, the calm, self-sustained, fashionable Alice, snatched at the bouquet, and dexterously substracting a slip of paper from between the leaves, laid it again on her sister's lap.

Florence paid the flower girl and then took up her nosegay, sorting and resorting the flowers.

Alice leaned over the other side of the barouche and whispered to Sir Miles Cressingham.

"Ah, traitor!" she said, in accents, the honied tone of which might have charmed away a soul. "Ah, traitor! see for what thou hast betrayed me; you, whom I love, are less in her thoughts than the boy, Herbert Mandeville. Read and be convinced!"

With these last words, Alice Amery slipped into the hands of Sir Miles the billet which she had stolen from the nosegay.

This was a mean, a base action in the beautiful Alice; but she was governed by love, and love, in such passionate unreasoning natures as her's, is mean, magnanimous, selfish, and self-denying by turns.

Poor Florence, meantime, turned over her bouquet with trembling fingers; the action of Alice had been so sudden in snatching it and abstracting the billet, that she could not prevent it.

Apparently, she had expected to find some such missive, for after arranging and rearranging her flowers, she turned her face, with a look of blank disappointment, where Herbert Mandeville still lingered; but he was conversing eagerly with the flower girl, whose sharp eye had detected Alice Amery in subtracting the note of her sister's lover from among the flowers.

Florence sighed, as she observed this, and turned her beautiful hazel eyes towards her sister with a pitiful, pleading look, that would have melted any heart but one smarting under a disappointed passion, and throbbing with hatred against her who had caused that disappointment.

"Oh cease to persecute me; how does my love for Herbert Mandeville injure you?" said the dove-like hazel eyes of Florence.

"I will betray all to your father," answered the flashing black orbs of Alice. "You have robbed me of the man I love, he loves you, that is your offence." As plainly as though words had spoken it, this was what passed between the sisters.

Florence sighed again, and cast down her eyes to conceal the tears that filled them. Herbert Mandeville moved away, still followed by the flower girl, and Alice turned her eyes towards the course, now the one object of attention, for the horses appeared at the starting post.

It did not require to be a professional, a determined turfite, a bookmaker, or backer, or owner of any one of those splendid animals with a fortune depending on its speed, to awaken an interest in the race at that final moment. Then broke out cheers for Iphigenia, and stakes of enormous magnitude were freely ventured on her as the favourite.

How beautiful she looked, the noble creature, with her glossy coat shining like ripe chesnuts in the morning sun, her dilated nostrils snuffing in the clear air, her small head, with its delicate ears erected, and her slender, graceful limbs.

The jockey who rode Iphigenia was a smart, good-looking young man, who well became his trim costume, his bright blue jacket and cap. No wonder the whole field, almost, were for the bay mare, for she showed her metal at the start, at once distancing her rivals, and maintaining her advantage half the length of the course, when to the utter astonishment, almost horror of the spectators, she suddenly paused, reared high in the air, which she beat with her fore-hoofs, staggered back, and fell rolling over and over upon the unfortunate jockey.

Even as she fell, her limbs again quivered, and she uttered that painful, dreadful cry, with which the wounded horse on the field of battle thrills the human ear, but when the other horses swept past, and the stewards and officials of the races crowded on the course, it was from beneath the lifeless body of the bright beautiful Iphigenia that they dragged the crushed form of her no less lifeless rider.

CHAPTER II.

TIM HAWKINS: THE JOCKEY'S BROTHER—THE MANOR HOUSE AT ST. OSWIN'S.

It was about ten o'clock in the evening of the great day of the races at Newmarket, that a young man in the garb of a groom, spurred a jaded and travel-stained horse along a lonely road in the county of Suffolk, near where it is bounded by Cambridgeshire.

The night was not as fine as the day which had preceded it; the wind blew in hollow piping gusts, the moon, which was near the full, was occasionally obscured by the eddying clouds, and a smart drift of rain was occasionally dashed in the face of the traveller.

Neither the unpleasant state of the weather nor the darkness of the road when the moon was hidden seemed any obstacle to the traveller, who still urged his horse on in spite of all impediments.

An occasional sigh, or rather sob, which burst from the young man's bosom, seemed to denote some mental grief or anxiety; but as the pale moonlight occasionally streamed over him, it did not discover any refinement or sensibility unusual to one of his class, either in his air or the cast of his features. He was rather a stoutly built and tolerably good-looking youth, about eighteen or nineteen years of age, with the ruddy complexion, blue eyes, and curling light brown hair of the Anglo-Saxons. He looked like what he was, a country lad, employed perhaps at twelve or thirteen years of age, about the stables of some sporting gentleman, who, as he grew older, had been promoted through his activity and intelligence, to the responsible service of a groom.

"There's some mortal villianny at the bottom of the whole affair, that I'll take my oath on," muttered the youth. "I'll hear what Mr. Herbert thinks about it, in course he understands things better nor a poor ignorant lad such as I am. As to Sir Miles Cressingham, he has as many tricks as that devil of a Grey Gelding of his, that he persuaded Mr. Herbert to mount one day, and that would have thrown him for certain if he had not had the firmest hand and surest seat of any young gentleman that ever put foot in stirrups. My word, Sir Miles calls that horse Satan, he should call himself Satan too, for old Nick himself was never more disappointed at losing a soul he was 'ticing to sin, than Sir Miles was at the style in which Mr. Herbert mastered that fiend of a horse. Jemini! it was fine to see how he lashed and gored the brute, and kept just as though he was strapped in the saddle, when the wretch all but reared upright, and even when he dashed down into the river. By the Lord, as my poor Dick said at the time, I believe Sir Miles was sorry that the horse found his master instead of the man! I never shall forget how he scowled, when the devil of a brute stood shivering on the rivers bank, and let Mr. Herbert dismount and lead him by the rein, as quietly as though he had been a mare trained for a lady's riding. Ah! just so Sir Miles scowled at me to day. He is at the bottom of what has happened, I am sure he is. I don't know how, but I am sure of it, and Mr. Herbert shall find it out and master Sir Miles, as he did the horse Satan; aye, although he is ten Satans of horse and man rolled into one, which I almost think he is. But whoa, here we are, there are lights burning still at St. Oswin's, and as we don't want to be stopped at the Mandeville Arms and asked any questions about the races, Brown Bertram,

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we'll just steer clear of the village, and start for the Manor House."

As the young groom, whose name was Timothy Hawkins, thus apostrophised the animal he rode, he turned into a bridle path, across a common that skirted a little village nestled among orchards and corn fields, and bearing the title of St. Oswin's. The Mandeville family, of which the young officer Herbert, the lover of Florence Amery, was now the male representative, were Lords of the Manor of St. Oswin's, and owners of the rich lands about the village. But the grandfather and father of Herbert had been sporting men like Mr. Amery, but they were particularly unfortunate in their racing speculations, and timber was cut down, and acre after acre of the estate mortgaged, till the income was little more than nominal.

The father of Herbert Mandeville died suddenly, just as the youth had completed his twenty-first year. The family solicitor, who was called in to arrange the business of the estate, found that Mr. Mandeville had raised large sums of money from Jewish usurers, which he had squandered in his horse racing speculations; the principal and interest of these sums having been in liquidation from the income of the estates. For a considerable amount of this money, the persons who had lent it usuriously could not prefer a legal claim, and Mr. Harding, the solicitor, earnestly advised Herbert to refuse further payment.

"Am I clearly to understand, my dear sir," said young Mandeville, when the lawyer made this statement, "that these persons depended on my father's honour to repay them? and have no resource but in mine!"

"Exactly, my dear boy!" answered Mr. Harding, the rascals have not a leg to stand upon in a court of justice, they advanced the money at that enormous rate of interest, relying upon your father's fantastical honour to secure the success of their dishonesty; ah! ah! Messrs. Shadrach and Isaacson, you have over-reached yourselves once in a way, you have been rather too clever, this time."

"My dear Mr. Harding," said Herbert Mandeville, "since my father's honour was pledged to these men, mine is implicated also; I cannot suffer his name to be the mark for malignant abuse, because his death will have disappointed these men of their money, however unjust their claim may be."

"And do you mean to tell me that you mean to pay these fellows, these knaves, these thieves," exclaimed Mr. Harding.

"Unquestionably, so far as the means derived from the estate will suffice for the purpose."

"Oh, it will suffice for the purpose exceedingly well Mr. Herbert Mandeville," replied the lawyer ironically. "It will pay these horse leeches, these harpies, and it will also pay in quarterly instalments of five hundred pounds, a debt of five thousand pounds which your wise father owed to John Amery, the great turf speculator, who has his box down yonder at Newmarket, his mansion in St. James's Square, his villa at Twickenham, and his estate in Gloucestershire, for all of which such crazy harum scarum fools as your poor father contributed to pay."

"And when these and all other claims, legal or merely debts of honour left unpaid by my father are settled, what income will remain from the estate?" inquired Herbert Mandeville.

"Well," answered the lawyer with equal calmness, which on his part was assumed with considerable effort, "after these and all other claims, which my poor client's honour, as you call it, and good natured folly in my vocabulary, brought upon him are arranged, there will remain from an estate, the income of which is about ten thousand per annum, only a yearly stipend of about five hundred pounds. A goodly fortune upon which to keep up your old Manor House."

Herbert looked very grave at this announcement.

"My poor mother!" he ejaculated, "and dear aunt Emily, how will they bear the change, for I must conceal from them the reduction of our income."

"Well, if you are really so absurd as to think of liquidating debts, the payment of which the law would not claim," returned the lawyer, "you must of course give up residing at St. Oswin's; the house would let for a good rent, I have no doubt, and you can fit up one of the better sort of cottages, or a farm house, for the residence of Mrs. and Miss Mandeville."

"Never!" replied Herbert, "never! if at the cost of any personal privation I can prevent it, shall the house of my fathers become the residence of strangers. Besides, my dear mother and my aunt, it would break their hearts to leave St. Oswin's!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the lawyer, "my dear boy, you must excuse me; but really the notion of Mrs. and Miss Mandeville dying of a broken heart is so exquisitely amusing. Trust to my long, professional experience, Herbert; and be well assured that ladies' hearts are made of much tougher material than novelists represent. A neat, comfortable little cottage for your mother and aunt, and St. Oswin's let on a repairing lease, appears to me the only sensible plan, if you are resolved to carry out your Quixotic design of paying all your father's debts of honour."

Herbert was resolved to pay his father's debts to the last farthing, and he was equally resolved that his mother and aunt, both of whom he dearly loved, should not be driven from St. Oswin's; and the lawyer, though he grew very angry over what he called Herbert's romantic folly, was fain to arrange everything in conjunction with his wishes.

The fidelity with which Herbert paid his father's debts to Mr. Amery won for him the friendship of that gentleman, for Mr. Amery was greedy of money as all people of luxurious habits must be.

In the exuberance of his admiration for an honour in Herbert's conduct, which, under similar circumstances, would not have marked his own, Mr. Amery invited the young ensign as he then was, to his house, and introduced him to the dangerous society of his daughters.

As Herbert had only been able to retain possession of the manor-house by shutting up the principal rooms, dismissing the superior servants, and resigning four hundred pounds a year out of his five hundred to his mother and aunt, he certainly was not in a position to aspire to the hand of a beautiful young lady, the supposed co-heiress of a large fortune.

But Love never asks leave of Prudence to take up his abode in a youthful heart; so Herbert Mandeville forgot that he was only worth one hundred a year and his commission, and the gentle Florence forgot how fiercely her father had often said he would disown any one of his daughters who dared to wed with poverty, for Mr. Amery calculated on large fortunes, if not coronets, for his beautiful daughters.

It was a month or two after he had so imprudently introduced Ensign Mandeville to his family, that Mr. Amery and Sir Miles Cressingham became intimately acquainted.

Sir Miles had just become a widower, he was a prize in the matrimonial market, and, though not a peer, he had the jingle of a title to please the ear of Mr. Amery, who had that weakness for decorative appellations so common among persons not themselves of patrician origin: for Mr. Amery's father had been a wealthy brewer.

Any of his daughters who married Sir Miles would be called "my lady;" that was something, though the man was not a peer.

Beyond this, as the young ladies had no mother, their father felt some of the anxieties which, had she lived, would have been endured more exclusively by the female parent. He was disappointed, in fact, that two or three at least of his six daughters had not secured a brilliant match the first season of their appearance.

The stiff old Queen Charlotte had been gracious, when in consideration of a present of a magnificent bracelet, a faded, highly-born, and very needy old dowager baroness, had condescended to present them. The Prince Regent

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had been loud in the expression of his admiration of them, they were a toast with every shameless roué, young and old; their patronage was solicited for public balls, concerts, charity dejeuners, and fancy fairs, under the protecting wing of the old Lady Fitzwalter; they were admitted to the exclusive circles, the most scheming mamma never hesitated to invite them, because they drew the best men in their train, while their marriage was an improbable event, as they had been talked about and flirted with too much; while, a more cogent reason for their continued celibacy than all the rest, it had been whispered that the fortune of the Amery girls was likely to prove a myth, as their father was speculating rashly and living far beyond his means; perhaps with an idea that his lavish expenditure would dazzle and secure an establishment for his daughters, with suitors who would not inquire too closely into the amount of the dowry they might expect.

Mr. Amery must certainly have been greatly disappointed in his first expectations, of an establishment for his daughters, or he would not have been so much elated when he found that the intentions of Sir Miles Cressingham were serious.

The lover-like attentions of the baronet, when he first became a visitor at Mr. Amery's house in St. James' Square, were at first directed to Alice, a haughty beauty whose proud heart had hitherto resisted all impressions, but who, with the strange perversity which has so much to do with the fate of woman, became desperately in love with Sir Miles, a man near forty years of age with no great amount of personal attraction.

Florence Amery was on a visit in the country when Sir Miles became acquainted with the family; he had not actually solicited the hand of Alice from her father, but the latter gentleman daily looked for the proposal; and his astonishment was great when, a week after Florence had returned to town, Sir Miles entreated her as a bride.

Truth to tell, Mr. Amery was disappointed. Alice was now twenty-seven years of age, Florence was scarcely eighteen, she would have plenty of other chances: he was becoming as nervous for his daughter Alice as her mother could have been.

Mr. Amery, however, like a prudent general, did not neglect a certain advantage because he had hoped for a greater one; he, therefore, dismissed Sir Miles with a promise that he would use all his fatherly influence to secure a favourable reception of his offer from Florence.

Mr. Amery more readily promised this, because Sir Miles totally ignored all question of dowry; affirming, with all the ardour of a youth's first love, that it was the fair Florence, and not her fortune, that he sought.

When, however, Mr. Amery came to lay the baronet's pretensions before his youngest daughter, she told him with the utmost calmness, but with a determination he had not supposed her capable of, that she could never receive Sir Miles Cressingham as a husband, that she could never love him, and scarcely indeed respect him, since he could so readily and dishonourably transfer his affections; as she was not ignorant that his first addresses had been paid to her sister Alice, whose peace of mind the baronet had most heartlessly trifled with.

Whatever reply Mr. Amery might have made to this declaration of Florence, was prevented by his eldest daughter bursting suddenly into the room.

Alice Amery was a woman in whom pride and passion were always contending for a mastery. She had noted, with a bursting heart, the coolness of Sir Miles and the transfer of his attentions to her sister; but, till she overheard the conversation of her father with Florence, she was not aware that the baronet had actually proposed for her. Then her indignation knew no bounds.

There were folding-doors between the room in which Mr. Amery was speaking with Florence and the adjoining chamber where Alice was sitting, and the doors being partially ajar, she had thus overheard all.

She held an open letter in her hand as she entered, the fine colour had fled her cheeks, and her lips were blanched with passion.

"Why is my sister such a hypocrite, sir!" she said, extending the letter to her father, "why does she not tell you that there is a romantic love affair between her and that young man, Herbert Mandeville. Why, the morning's post has brought me this letter, in which he entreats my influence with you, as your elder daughter, to give him leave to hope that, when the incumbrances on his estate are paid off, you will bestow on him the hand of Florence. The young lady's own consent he appears quite assured of!"

It was now Mr. Amery's turn to grow pale with passion.

"The pauper!" he thundered, "the insolent pretender! When the incumbrances of his estate are paid off; how, or when will that be? Oh, I forgot; the gentleman's regiment is under orders for Spain, perhaps he thinks the chances of war will give him a coronet, that he will supplant Lord Wellington. And you, too, Madam!" he continued, addressing the now trembling Florence, "how dared you encourage this man, how dared you love him?"

Poor Florence might have answered that she loved Herbert Mandeville because she could not help it, that the noble qualities of his heart and mind had charmed her, no less than the manly form of his person and the fascinations of his manner; but she was prevented by her sister, who, turning upon her with a furious air, exclaimed—

"And I too, madam, have equal reason with your father to complain of your conduct. How dare you assert that I endure a wound of the heart from a man who would turn his thoughts to you? I love Sir Miles Cressingham!—I hate, I despise him; I would trample him beneath my feet! I love Sir Miles Cressingham—ha! ha! ha!"

The laugh of Alice Amery was hysterical, and ended in a passionate fit of sobbing.

Florence ran to assist her, but she pushed her away; she could not control the bitterness of her grief and mortification.

"Artful and insolent girl!" she exclaimed, "is it not enough that you should thwart your father by the refusal of an offer you ought thankfully to accept, but that you must outrage me, by the assertion that I would ever have condescended to waste a thought on a man who could pass me aside for you, or any other woman!"

In addition to this storm of unjust reproach from her sister, Florence had to endure the anger of her father, who threatened her with his severest displeasure if she did not forthwith renounce all communication with Herbert Mandeville.

To the young man himself he wrote an intemperate letter, upbraiding him with having stolen the affections of Florence with a base view to her fortune, and assuring him that, if they married clandestinely, he would not give her a shilling.

In the reply, which Herbert felt it due to himself to return to this letter, he said that he felt no humiliation and but little anger at the infamous charge of fortune-hunting which Mr. Amery had thought proper to bring against him, because that gentleman well knew how utterly and absurdly it was false. The result of these letters was a separation between Florence and her lover, who had not for some months been even so near to each other as they were on the morning of the races.

It was not the first time, however, that the treasures of Flora had veiled the missives of Cupid; and when the flower girl brought the bouquet to Florence, she felt sure that it contained a note from her lover.

Mr. Amery had a house near Newmarket, which, like all his residences, had every appurtenance of wealth: extensive pleasure grounds were attached to the Cedars, the name of the mansion, and the head gardener, though Mr. Amery was ignorant of it, was a native of St. Oswin, and the son of an old tenant of the Mandevilles. He had known Herbert from a boy and idolized him, as he was idolized by all who were themselves honest and upright, and could therefore estimate his noble and generous nature.

This man at the risk of losing his place, a certain re-

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sult if his kindly act had been discovered, had more than once conveyed a letter from Herbert to Florence concealed in a bunch of flowers.

This, then, was the state of affairs in the Amery family on the eventful morning of the races. Sir Miles Cressingham, with a want of delicacy of which a true gentleman would have been incapable, still visited and forced his attentions on Florence; though, in rejecting his suit, she made no secret of her attachment to Herbert Mandeville, and her determination to marry no one else.

If the young lieutenant was beloved by his inferiors, such was not the distinction awarded to Sir Miles Cressingham; whose conduct towards his servants, or any other persons in the humbler walks of life, was at once reserved, severe, and often inspired absolute hatred.

The young groom, Timothy Hawkins, who sought Herbert Mandeville the night after the races, was one of these persons in whom Sir Miles had awakened this hatred, which is always dangerous to its object however lofty may be his worldly condition.

He was an honest, good-hearted lad Tim Hawkins, the brother of the unfortunate jockey who had been taken up dead from beneath the lifeless body of the poor bay mare, Iphigenia.

However simple and uneducated, really honest and good-hearted people rarely err in their judgment, or rather their instincts, when they come in contact with a nature thoroughly depraved.

Thus poor Tim Hawkins, the groom, conceived a violent dislike of Sir Miles Cressingham, the wealthy baronet, the first day that they met; and this not merely from the great man's peculiarly insolent and overbearing manner, but from a natural feeling of repulsion such as paralyses the bird in the presence of the rattle snake.

It was in his suspicious hatred of Sir Miles that the young groom was speeding towards the abode of Herbert Mandeville, on that drear spring evening.

His faith in Herbert's virtue and judgment was as supreme as his abhorence of Sir Miles.

Tim had ridden at a desperate pace thirteen miles without drawing his bridle; and the horse, one of the best out of Mr. Amery's stables, somewhat flagged as his rider finally slacked his pace at the park gates of the manor house of St. Oswin.

Alas! the fallen fortunes of a once wealthy family were evident even there. The stately iron gates were red with rust and unlocked, one of them swinging on its hinges with a harsh and melancholy sound, as the rising blast swayed it to and fro.

The lodge was untenanted, the Mandevilles could not afford to maintain a lodge-keeper, and the once pretty tenement had fallen into decay. The deadly night-shade and the rank thistle, mingled with the "garden flowers grown wild" upon its threshold, and the jessamine and red honeysuckle, trained of old so carefully on its walls, now, in unpruned luxuriance, flapped their long tendrils against the diamond paned casements. The park paling was broken, the grass had grown up on the avenue overarched with stately elms, that led to the grand entrance of the manor house.

Plain simple Tim had no eye for these things that particular moment, at another time his heart had swelled with sorrow for the downfall of a family who, in the language of the country side, "were always good to the poor!" He pressed his horse over the tangled grass that carpeted the avenue till he reached the grand front of the mansion, a somewhat dreary structure of the Elizabethian area.

The broad stately steps that led to the great entrance hall were overgrown with weeds, and not a solitary taper sent its feeble gleam through the small panes of the tall windows on the grand facade.

Then, in a turmoil as was the mind of poor Tim with his master's troubles and his own, he remembered the reduced circumstances of the family at St. Oswin's; and that once when he had been sent there with a letter by Miss Florence, ere her father knew of the love between her and Herbert Mandeville, he had found admittance at a side entrance of the manor house, and thereby discovered that Mrs. Mandeville and her sister-in-law, used what had once been the housekeeper's room, as their sitting apartment.

Tim dismounted, and throwing the bridle of his horse over his arm, led him towards the gate of a little courtyard, which was the entrance to the rooms occupied by the superior servants in the time of the family's prosperity.

The low arched gate of this courtyard stood open, and as Tim Hawkins passed through it, he perceived the cheerful glow of a fire lighting up the casements and casting a long line of ruddy light on the paving stones of the court, which were not here interlaced with weeds.

The sound of the horse's hoofs, an unusual one at the manor, was heard by the occupants of the pleasant kitchen, the windows of which overlooked the court; and ere Tim could ring the bell, the door was opened by an elderly woman-servant, who, in conjunction with her husband, who discharged the contrary duties of butler, groom, and gardener, formed the whole establishment of servants at St. Oswin's.

"Why, the Lord be good to us!" exclaimed the old woman, as the young man dismounted and attached the bridle of his horse to a stanchion of the doorway. "The Lord be good to us! what can bring you here at this time of night? Not but what you are as welcome at St. Oswin's as the flowers in May, seeing that I hope Squire Amery has thought better of his bad behaviour to Master Herbert;—you bring a message from him, I hope?"

"No, Mrs. Jones, I am sorry to say not!" answered Tim, as he followed the old servant into the house, "I come to see Mr. Herbert on my own account, its not much as master thinks about lovers and love affairs to-night, I reckon. You know he had mortal bad luck at the races this morning, and—and my dear brother!—and—and Iffyginny, as they calls her, the mare,—curse her! though, for the matter o' that, I reckon the poor brute couldn't help it—she stumbled and fell dead on the course! And that weren't the worst: my dear brother Dick, the blithest and best jockey that ever mounted a horse, and the best brother as ever were in the world, she rolled over him, 'od rot her, and his chest was crushed, and his head fractured, and he only breathed twice after they took him up. Oh, Dick, my dear, dear brother!—oh! oh! oh!" sobbed poor Tim, fairly breaking down and dropping into the chair which the sympathising Mrs. Jones had placed for him.

For a few minutes the lad gave way to a storm of grief that absolutely frightened the poor woman; then suddenly choking down his sobs, and drying his eyes, he started up, exclaiming—

"But, I know what it all was, I do; and I will be revenged, I will! My poor Dick shall not be as good as murdered, and they get off who were at the bottom of it. Mrs. Jones, do a poor fellow a kindness. I heard from a friend of his, a young officer chap, that Mr. Herbert left the course after Iffyginny's tumble, and said he was going home; now, if he be at home, oh! Mrs. Jones, for the love of Heaven, ask him to let me speak with him alone for five minutes. I don't want to see the ladies, the matter I has to speak on ain't fit for no woman's ears! But I know Mr. Herbert is a brave, good young gentleman; and I tell you, Mrs. Jones, I am in a mortal bad strait, and it wants a wiser head nor a poor servant's to unravel such a tangled skein; and if Mr. Herbert won't help me through, then there is no one else I can go to in his stead. Go now, there's a good woman, ask him to see me!"

The good Mrs. Jones enjoyed a very abundant share of the curiosity, which is said to be the great failing which Mother Eve has bequeathed to her daughters; and, upon anything like an ordinary occasion, she would have overwhelmed Tim Hawkins with questions. But, if Mrs. Jones was curious, she was also very shrewd; and from various expressions of Tim, she thought the matters of which he had to speak with her young master were somewhat dangerous to meddle with, and that it was safest to know nothing about them.

Herbert Mandeville was sitting with his mother and

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aunt in the little parlour, which was fitted up for their use. His mother, who was an invalid, was dosing in her easy chair, Miss Mandeville was busy over her embroidery frame.

A quarto volume on Military Tactics lay open on the table before Herbert, but he could not force his mind to his study, and while his eye rested on the page, he mechanically muttered over its instructions, while in his thoughts the scenes of the morning, the race course, the struggling steed, the royal stand, and the starting post, were jumbled with infantry divisions, hollow squares, lines, and parallels.

He was quite glad when the entrance of the servant gave him an excuse for closing the book, and the fantasies which had bent him since the morning, took a more definite shape, when he was told that Mr. Amery's favourite groom, Tim Hawkins, wished to speak with him alone.

"My dear Herbert, what is the matter!" inquired Mrs. Mandeville, rousing from her dose.

"Why, my dear Laura," said Aunt Emily, "there's the groom of that Mr. Amery, it seems, wants to speak to Herbert; I am sure if I were he, I would not see the fellow, like master like man; I suppose that upstart Amery has got into some trouble about his horse to-day, and now comes sneaking to Herbert to help him out of it."

"My dear aunt!" returned Herbert, "Mr. Amery could scarce look to such a poor devil as I am to help him over a loss of a hundred thousand pounds, and that I was told is the lowest amount for which Mr. Amery is responsible, through his mare being distanced to-day, he had contracted such enormous bets in her favour."

"Serve him right, a low-born, base gambler, said the inexorable Miss Mandeville. "Thank heaven you are out of his debt, don't see this groom, Herbert, don't have anything to do with any of the family."

"The groom is an honest fellow enough," answered Herbert, "both he and his brother, who was killed by the fall of the horse, were born I believe at St. Oswin's; besides, as I understand from Jones, it is on his own account, and not on his master's that he wishes to see me, and however that may be, I shall certainly see the poor fellow."

With these words, Herbert quitted the room, bidding Mrs Jones send Tim Hawkins to him in the library. "Humph," muttered Miss Mandeville discontentedly, "I verily believe that boy is so infatuated with the daughter of that gambling, horse-racing villian, that if he comes to his death, and loses all his money, he will be fool enough in his embarassed position to marry the girl without a fortune, though she has been refused to him with one."

"Oh my dear Emily, I hope not!" laughingly answered Mrs. Mandeville, as she drew her shawls round her, and sunk into another dose.

Mrs. Mandeville was an amiable but feeble minded woman; Aunt Emily, equally good and affectionate, had more energy, but neither of them could overcome the dislike with which it seems inevitable that all women should regard the wife, or promised wife, of a brother, a nephew, or a son.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERVIEW IN THE LIBRARY.

Though prepared for some unusual communication on the part of Tim Hawkins, Herbert was not only surprised, but startled by the gloom and determination of the youth's manner, when he was ushered into the library. That library at St. Oswin's was a fine old chamber, walled with books, many of them rare and of great value; but the immediate predecessors of Herbert, his father, and grandfather, were so little of literary men, that they did not even know that in those dusty tomes they possessed a treasure which could have been converted into a very considerable amount of that gold, which was so necessary to them both, in the pursuit of their coarse pleasures. The "middle age" revivals, which are the taste of the present day were then in the womb of futurity; the ugly sordid vulgarity of Puritanism, still clung about all who made any pretence to religion, the charitable and pure tenets of which were debased by a malignant abhorence of all that was graceful and beautiful, in art and nature, that carried on a Hudibrastic war against velvet draperies, fretted pinnacles, and painted windows, and denied that God could be reverently worshipped save in a white-washed barn with sash windows. This profane hatred of grace and beauty in inanimate things, extended from the altar to the domestic hearth, and even tainted the seminaries of learning; and thus it was that the costly vellum M.S.S., with their glittering illuminations of gold, and azure, and vermillion, slumbered in the dust on the shelves of the library of St. Oswin's, while their stupid owners were borrowing money of the usurers. It was a gloomy apartment, the library of St. Oswin's, and the light of the single taper which stood on the table between Herbert and the groom, flashed in the pale grief stricken face of the latter, and left a dark background of obscurity behind him, which a vivid mind would have peopled with unearthly and fantastic forms.

"You wished to see me, Hawkins; have you any message from your master, or, or——"

"From Miss Florence, sir?" said the lad, divining the name that hung upon the lovers lip. "Oh no sir, it is on another matter I come to you sir." Oh Lieutenant Mandeville, you are so good, so dear, so brave, oh do help me with your learning, for I will have revenge on Sir Miles Cressingham, for oh Mr. Herbert, he has as good as murdered my poor brother Dick! and I will have his life for it sooner or later. Blood for blood, I will!"

"Good heavens, Hawkins, what is it you mean?" ejaculated Herbert.

"It is murder, I mean!—its poison, I mean!—Lieutenant Mandeville!" responded the young man, becoming greatly excited.

"My good fellow," said Herbert, "recollect yourself; your grief for the sad fate of your brother has surely deprived you of reason, for heaven sake be careful how you utter those wild expressions. What likelihood, what possibility is there that Sir Miles Cressingham should have murdered your brother? Depend on it, Hawkins, the poor fellow was killed merely by the fall of the mare."

"Aye, aye, lieutenant: that's just what he was," answered Tim, doggedly, "that's just what I want to bring it to. My brother, one of the best jockeys that ever rode a race, was killed by the fall of the horse, that's very certain. But how come the horse to fall, lieutenant? aye, there you have it."

"How should I know, Hawkins?" answered Herbert, "I am but little of a sporting man; I suppose the poor animal was attacked by some sudden illness. She died in a fit I was told by the doctors who examined her."

"A fit!" said Tim, "well, sir, I suppose it were a fit. But how come the mare, who was in sound health, I'll swear for her, last night, to have a fit this morning?"

"How can I tell?—I cannot possibly say," said Herbert.

"I suppose not, sir," answered the young groom: "but if you cannot tell anything about why the poor mare was took ill and died so sudden, I reckon Sir Miles Cressingham can; and he shall too, he shall, if there's law in England. And that is the long and the short why I took the liberty to come to you, Lieutenant Mandeville."

"For heaven's sake, Hawkins, endeavour to control your feelings, and be more explicit," said Herbert, "sit down and let me know what it really is with which you would charge Sir Miles Cressingham: for I tell you plainly, as your well-wisher, it will be dangerous to yourself publicly to make these vague but dreadful charges against a man of the wealth and position of Sir Miles."

The head of the poor lad fell upon his breast as he uttered a choking sob, and he sat in silence with his arms folded for the space of a few minutes; then passing his hand athwart his brow, as if to clear his confused faculties, he said—"I know its all true, as you say, sir; and that there's a many who would string up a poor lad, such as I am, to the gallows itself for daring to breath a word about

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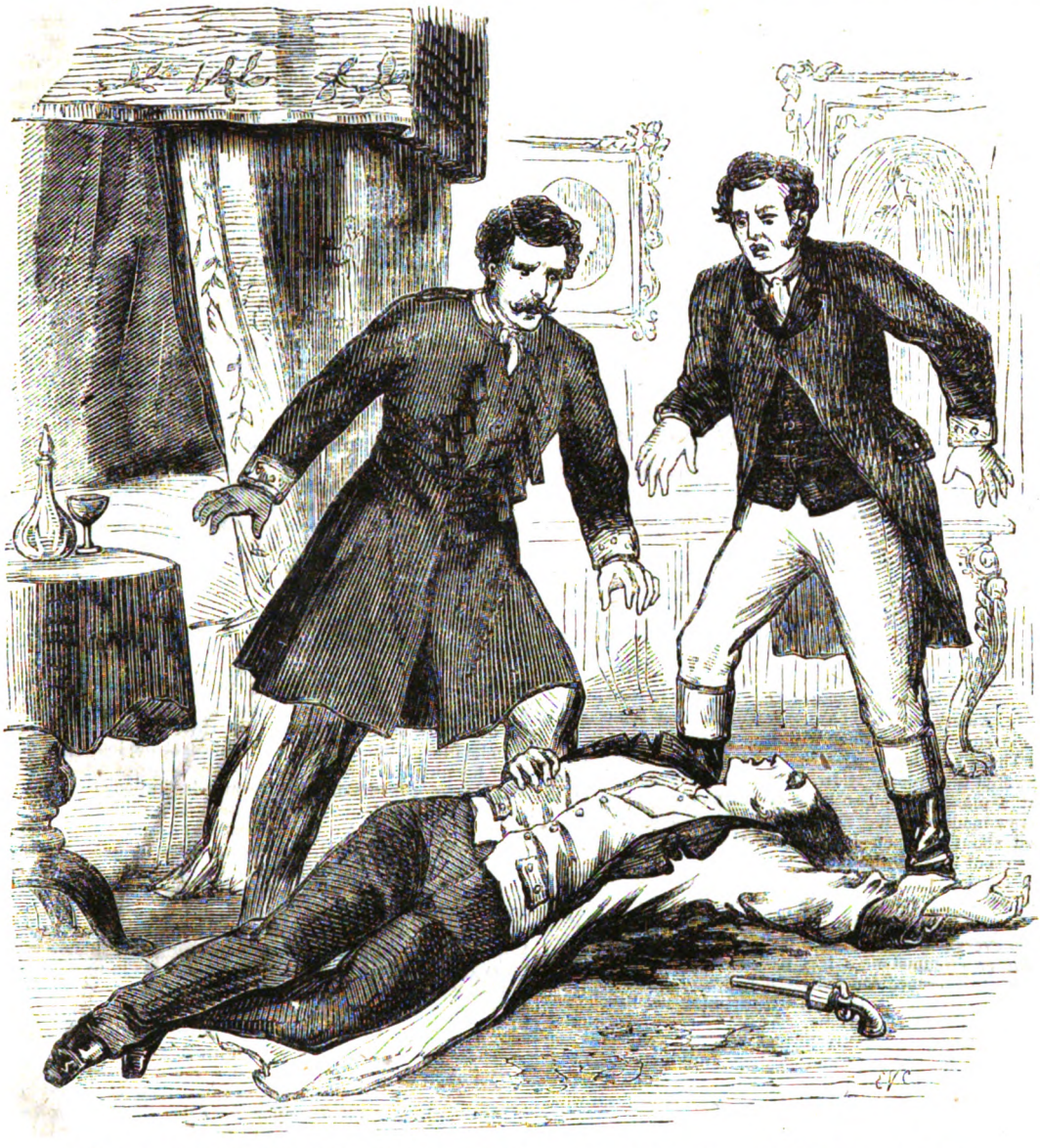

HORROR OF HERBERT MANDEVILLE AND TIM HAWKINS AT DISCOVERING THE DEAD BODY OF MR. AMERY.

foul play to either horse or man from such a great grand gentleman as Sir Miles Cressingham. I know all this, Lieutenant Mandeville, and that was why I made bold to come to you; for I could not have had no rest in my mind till I told all I knew, and had been noticing for some time past, to some one with a wiser head than my own. In course you knows, Lieutenant Mandeville, how very intimate master has been with Sir Miles for some time past?"

"I do, indeed," replied Herbert with a sigh, which he could not repress, "their intimacy commenced, I believe, about this time last year."

"Surely it did, sir," answered the groom. "Well you know, sir, servants is but men and women, and they will talk about their betters—no preventing it, sir. Well, as I was saying, about the time of the Newmarket races last year master got friendly with Sir Miles Cressingham, and he was a deal at the Cedars, and, for the matter o' that, at James's Square, and at the White Abbey in Gloucestershire, too. None of us servants liked Sir Miles, sir; for though he were prouder nor any duke in the land, he was very mean, very. We all thought he was going to marry Miss Alice, for he seemed a deal took with her. But in the end, it seemed it were Miss Florence he were running after; and she liked somebody else better, and no wonder. Don't be offended, sir; we poor servants have eyes, and we do see what shameful goings on there are in rich families, which have money enough and which ought to be contented. Well, sir, if we sees what goes on with the love affairs of the young gents, we learns a bit about the money matters of the old ones; and I have knowed a deal, sir, for a long while which I was sorry to know, and never told a word about it to no mortal soul but my poor brother Richard what's now lying stark dead, thanks to that villain Sir Miles. Well, poor Dick says, sir: he says to me, 'Now, Tim, you hear, see, and say nothing. I'm mortal sorry that Squire Amery should be a borrowing so much money of that ere Sir Miles, sorry he should

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have to borrow money of anybody let alone that skulking Sir Miles, which I hate; seeing that he knows the points of a horse as well I do, and yet never tips a single shiner for a bet on the best racer that ever padded the turf. Howsomever, I'm very sorry for the squire, for he has been main hind to you and me, Tim.' And so he had, sir," said Tim, pausing in repeating the speech of his brother, Squire Amery were very good to us, for he paid the doctor when our poor old mother was dying, and paid her funeral; and when he found what a clever rider Dick was, he put him forwards on the turf, and let him ride his bay colt, Hector, five years ago, what won the plate; and, besides, took me into his service when I were no better nor a child. Well, Lieutenant Mandeville, I was grateful, and so was poor Dick, he was. And he says to me only three nights ago, 'Never you mind about what Squire owes Sir Miles, Tim, he's sure to have great innings on Iffyginny; I am to ride her, remember, and after the race Squire will be up in cash and able perhaps to pay Sir Miles.' I didn't say much to poor Dick, sir," continued Hawkins, 'cause I didn't want to damp his spirits like; but I feared as master owed too much to Sir Miles for one race, however lucky, to pay it."

"But, surely," said Herbert, interrupting the groom at this point of his story, "if Sir Miles had so much owing to him by Mr. Amery he must have wished him to win, not to lose; why should he injure the mare, he had as much interest in her winning as her owner by your account."

"So it would seem, sir, so it would seem," answered Hawkins, "but, oh! sir, you don't know the artfulness of that ere villain, Sir Miles; it is all along of Miss Florence, sir."

"Miss Florence!" ejaculated Herbert, "is it possible that Sir Miles has been so great a villain as to lend money to Mr. Amery with the base object of forcing the consent of Florence to a marriage with himself?"

"There you have it, sir; that's just the very ticket," answered the groom. "In course you may be surprised that a man, thought so rich as ma-ter, should want to borrow money at all. So was I at first, and never said a word about it when I knew how the land lay, except to Dick; but now, as the matter will be all over Newmarket and London, too, before to-morrow night, there's not no use in keeping up one's pride any longer; for it does hurt one's pride, sir, to have one's master known to be poor when everybody thought him rich."

Under circumstances less painful to himself, or less serious to Florence Amery, Herbert would have been inclined to laugh at the nature of the pride which was wounded in poor Hawkins. As it was, however, not a smile appeared upon his lips as he implored the young man to be more speedy and explicit and to state the real nature of his charge against Sir Miles Cressingham.

"Why this, sir," answered Hawkins, "that, from what I have overheard, I believe as Sir Miles is better pleased that master should have lost than won, he has him in his power; and he was in the stable with master last night a pretending to fondle poor Iffyginny, and he kept a fidgeting about her head, and pretending to look at her mouth: and, I believe, he put some devilish poisoned pill or lozenge down her throat, what he knew would just work his wicked will and kill the poor brute to-day."

Mandeville shook his head.

"My good fellow," he said, "the doctors will have to be heard as to whether the mare was poisoned; let me advise you on no account to venture so grave a charge. The assertion of your belief, without the most stringent proofs to support it, will do no injury to Sir Miles, but be of fatal consequence to you."

"Oh, Mr. Herbert!—on, lieutenant!—do not tell me that!" said poor Tim, "but come, pray come with me at once to the Cedars; there was a terrible scene atwixt my master and Sir Miles, truly, after the races were over. I heard Sir Miles jeer, and tell my master he must pay all penalties; and then my master said he would sell his stud, his lands, his houses, everything, and pay Sir Miles back his money, but he would not make a sale of Miss Florence. And then Sir Miles laughed, and said as he would have his money and Miss Florence, too; then they had high words. This was at the Inn; and in the end, the Squire promised to meet him in the Chinese pavilion in the grounds at the Cedars, and then he would settle everything; and Sir Miles laughed and said he would take care of that. Now, nights and nights past, sir, master and Sir Miles have sat smoking and drinking in the Chinese pavilion; and Sir Miles mostly has a bit of paper with him, which master signs when he is muddled with wine and does not half know what he is about. Now, Sir Miles is always a messing with doctor's stuff, he has got a room at Cressingham Hall, his valet has told us, all fitted up like a doctor's shop; and there he is over a great fire a pounding of drugs, and boiling and stewing leaves and herbs, sometimes all night long; and, I believe, that sometimes he doctors master's drink, the poor old gentleman gets so thorough muddled and like one crazy. Now, all these things have been a weighing on my mind a long time, Lieutenant Mandeville; and when I heard master raving to-day like a madman, and see my poor brother a lying dead, as good as murdered, and heard that villain Sir Miles, what I know is the cause of all, boast as he would have Miss Florence in spite of her father, and order him as it were to meet him at the Chinese pavilion, I saddled Brown Bertram and rode here for dear life to pray you, as you value justice and the dear young lady, to come over with me to the Cedars and stay with me in the shrubberies, so as to be a witness for my poor foolish master against Sir Miles."

CHAPTER III.

THE NIGHT RIDE—THE PISTOL SHOT—THE HIGHWAYMAN—THE CHINESE PAVILION.

The clock of the old village church, within a mile of Mr. Amery's mansion of the Cedars, had just tolled out the solemn hour of midnight as Tim Hawkins and Herbert Mandeville galloped past the edifice at the top speed of their horses.

It was not without considerable hesitation that the young officer had consented to accompany the groom on his journey back: for he, though he had some suspicion that the charges which the latter brought against Sir Miles were not unfounded, they were far too vague to furnish grounds for any open proceedings against him. Herbert felt, also, that the part he was called upon to play was that of an eave's dropper, and at that his noble and generous nature revolted. On the other hand, he could not doubt that his beloved Florence was in imminent danger from the daring villainy of Sir Miles; and finally he concluded that, as all stratagems are fair in love and war, he was justified in the practice of any measure by which he could avert danger from his mistress.

The night as it advanced became more stormy than it was even at an earlier hour, at intervals only the moon blazed with a fitful radiance from betwixt the leaden clouds that drifted athwart her disk, the wind blew bitterly cold, and particles of sleet were mingled with the driving rains. The soft spring day and the stormy inclement night that succeeded it very clearly proved the variable nature of the English climate.

The heart of Herbert Mandeville was heavy during that night ride. Few words passed between him and his companion; but, as he thought over all the latter had told him, and remembered that Sir Miles bore the repute of being a chemist of rare research and science, and was beyond that a most unscrupulous and vindictive man, it appeared to him not improbable that the suspicions of Tim Hawkins were correct, and that Sir Miles had really tampered with the mare, Iphigenia, in so cunning a manner that it would be impossible to prove his misdeed.

They had passed the church by about a quarter of a mile, the dull heavy notes of the clock had ceased to reverberate upon the wind which moaned in hollow wailing gusts athwart the landscape, when a sharp but distant sound like the report of firearms struck the ears of the riders.

"What is that, Mr. Herbert?" said Tim, reining in his

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horse, "some rascal of a highwayman, I suppose, out after the winners of the races."

"Perhaps so," answered Herbert, "or it may be some one firing from a chamber window to warn the housebreakers."

Herbert did not think this, though he said it; a sick fear of a catastrophe horrible to hint at knocked at his heart, for the report of the pistol shot came from the direction in which lay the Cedars. Herbert plunged the spurs into the flanks of his horse, and pressed onward at an increased speed; the groom followed his example, he made no reply to Herbert's remark about the housebreakers, had the young officer's dread apprehension suggested itself to him, too? He remembered how like a desperate man his master had spoken and looked that day. The horses' run had measured perhaps another quarter of a mile, when a loud creeking of boughs was heard in the copse to the left. The road was bordered on either side by a copse. They both instinctively put their hands to their pistols—no one travelled at night, in those days, without firearms.

"I was right, then, it was a highwayman!" gasped Tim, and he uttered a positive sigh of relief, though he knew not what peril his life might be exposed to in an encounter with some desperado of the road.

As the copse was private property, a low paling separated it on either side from the high road; but the public were permitted to pass through it as it led by the nearest route to the village and the high London road.

Just at the point which Herbert and the young groom had now reached, there was on both sides of the way a swing gate in the paling which led into the wood paths. Simultaneously with the crushing of the boughs, as though he had broken his way through the thicket part of the copse, a man on horseback dashed along the path, and spurred the animal he rode against the gate, over which the creature leaped with the strength and ease of a thorough bred; and, spurning the ground with his hoofs as he crossed the road, vaulted over the gate on the other side, and disappeared with his rider from the startled gaze of Herbert and Hawkins.

"It was some scoundrel highwayman then, sir," said Hawkins, "who in the white glare of the moonbeams, which had shone out as the man crossed the road, had noticed the thickly laced coat of the rider, his mask, and the pistols in his belt.

The villain!" answered Herbert, "he has killed or wounded some one, but we cannot pursue him in the wood."

Relieved by what they now thought, that the report they had heard was from a pistol fired by the highwayman, Mandeville and the groom pursued their way and soon reached the avenue of the Cedars.

The grounds about the mansion were beautiful and extensive: comprising a paddock, where the horses were grazed, a small park, and a garden.

The Chinese Pavilion, where Tim had heard his master appoint his meeting with Sir Miles, was at the extremity of the park at a considerable distance from the house. Hawkins dismounted at a gate in the park paling, of which he had the key.

"We will leave the horses here, sir," he said, addressing Herbert who had also dismounted, "I'll tether them to a tree, and take you by yonder path to the pavillion!"

The young men proceeded on their way, Hawkins holding Mandeville by the hand, and guiding him, for the moon was again hidden, and the darkness beneath the trees almost palpable.

At length they entered a shrubbery of lilac and syringa, at the back of the pavilion.

"Here we are at last then, sir! and there comes her ladyship the moon, to light us up a bit!" said Hawkins, And soon as he spoke the pale luminary cast her silver light upon the gay painted and gilded cupola with its glittering balls that crowned the roof of the pavilion.

"But how is this?" pursued Tim, "there's no lights, master's meeting with Sir Miles is surely not over!"

"There are no voices, either," said Herbert, "we should hear the lowest murmur through that open window."

"I wonder it should have been left open!" exclaimed Hawkins, "stop a bit, sir, I can get to the top of that clump of rose bushes and look into the pavillion without being seen if anybody is there." Tim spoke in a whisper, and then quitting the side of the young officer groped his way cautiously to the top of a mound of flowers till he stood at the summit with his head on a level with the sill of the open window.

He put his head into the apartment, recoiled for a moment, then leaned forward again, and finally slid down the mound and grasping Herbert with a cold and shaking hand, he ejaculated in a hollow faltering voice, quite unlike his usual firm and cheery tone:—

"Sir, Lieutenant Mandeville, I cannot make it out, it is all dark inside the pavillion; but—but, oh Mr. Herbert, there is a smell of gunpowder and—of blood!"

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Mandeville, staggering as if he had received a blow, while his former horrible fear rushed with the speed of lightning on his mind, "What can be done? Have you no means, Hawkins, of procuring a light?"

"Yes sir," answered Hawkins in the same terrified accent, "luckily I always carry a flint and steel about me."

The admirable contrivance of phosphorous, and lucifer matches, were not at that period in domestic use, the tedious flint, steel, and tinder-box, were the housewife's appliances for kindling a fire.

Tim Hawkins, who could have pursued his way blindfold, led Mandeville round to the front entrance of the pavillion. The door at the summit of the marble steps was half open, all was profoundly dark within, but the moment that Hawkins led Mandeville across the threshold the sickening smell of gunpowder and blood, of which the young man had spoken, assailed his nostrils. He stood in a paroxysm of nervous horror such as he had never before experienced, while Hawkins vainly in his trepidation, endeavoured to strike a light, wounding and bruising his fingers, instead of hitting the flint. At length a spark glowed among the tinder, Hawkins fanned it into a flame, kindled a match, and lighted one of the lamps, which, filled with perfumed oil, were always ready for use in the pavillion.

The fittings of the pavillion were gay and gorgeous in the extreme. The lamps of ground glass gaily painted with birds, butterflies, and flowers, were made to imitate chinese lanterns. The walls were hung with straw colored silk, with the same objects embroidered on it in the natural colors. The coverings of the couches and chairs were of the same costly material, their frames were of ebony inlaid with silver, and the borderings and fringes of the curtains were also of the richest silver.

The apartment was one of fairy-like beauty; but, as the light of the lamp blazed up, both the young men uttered an exclamation of horror, for there on the velvet-piled, rainbow-tinted carpet, lay the unfortunate Mr. Amery weltering in his blood. In hideous contrast to the costly decorations of the chamber looked that grim, stark, mutilated corpse. The blood of the unfortunate man was spattered on the light straw colored silk of a settee, beside which he had fallen. The spectacle was truly horrible: half the side of the face had been blown away. The pistol with which the fatal deed had been committed lay at a little distance.

It was no doubt the report of that weapon, which Mandeville and Hawkins had heard.

The highwayman who had passed them was doubtless bent on some other errand.

On a mosaic table near the corpse were scattered a quantity of papers in the handwriting of the unhappy Mr. Amery. Among them was a letter directed to his DAUGHTER FLORENCE!

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CHAPTER V.

THE CORONER'S INQUEST—THE VERDICT—EMBARRASSED AFFAIRS OF THE SUICIDE—THE HIGHEST CREDITOR—THE ILL-TIMED PROPOSAL—THE REFUSAL—THREAT OF THE DISAPPOINTED SUITOR.

DISCLOSURES the most calamitous for his daughters were made at the inquest on the body of the unfortunate Mr. Amery. It appeared that his fortune, never so large as the world had been led to believe, had been for some years past greatly reduced by the extravagent rate at which he had lived, and by heavy losses at the gambling table. The keenness of judgment and calculation which had made Mr. Amery so successful a speculator on the turf seemed wholly to have abandonded him when he touched a card, and the sums set down in his private accounts as lost at whist were enormous.

Much of this money, it appeared, had been lost to Sir Miles Cressingham; who, from acknowledgements made by Mr. Amery and found among his papers, had not only never received the amount of these debts of honour, but with an imprudent liberality, had advanced large sums to his friend to be risked at the gambling table or on the race-course.

In conclusion, it was found that the unfortunate man had risked the whole remnant of his fortune on Iphigenia that being the favorite horse at the Newmarket races, and that, totally ruined by the catastrophe of the animal, he had not courage to face the sneers of the world, or to witness the distress of his daughters. Stakes, both of professionals and amateurs, had run so high in favour of Iphigenia that the losses of others than her unfortunate owner were very severe, and the sudden death of the animal was so extraordinary that there was an universal demand for her body to be subjected to surgical examination, as there was a suspicion afloat that she had been poisoned.

The result of this examination was a declaration that the mare had died from asphyxia, proceeding from natural causes, as no trace whatever of poison could be found in her body.

Tim Hawkins groaned on hearing this judgment of the veterinary surgeons following the coroner's verdict of temporary insanity in the case of Mr. Amery, and accidental death in that of Tim's brother, the unfortunate jockey.

"Them surgeons is fools!" he muttered. "There was foul play, I would stake my own life on it; and poor master's letter to Miss Florence might have proved it if nothing else did, aye, and showed who was the man who had an interest in poor Iffiginny going down. Well, the crowner, the surgeons, and the jury, is all fools or summut worse, if it be that they are afeard to say what they think because the guilt is with such a fine gentleman as Sir Miles Cressingham. He has got off with all them fine judges, but he has not got off with poor Tim Hawkins, nor with God Almighty, and that's the main point. Ah! I shall live to see my poor Dick's death avenged on that black villain yet!"

The terms of the letter left by the unfortunate Amery, and addressed to his daughter Florence had indeed given rise to the suspicion that he himself thought the mare had been tampered with.

"My Florence, my beloved child," began that letter, "may heaven have more care and mercy on you than has been shown to your guilty and miserable father. Wretch that I am, I have ruined all my children, but far my Florence above all the rest. Sir Miles Cressingham is a villain; why did he lend me his money; why did he make me so deeply his debtor? Did he think to buy my Florence, with his gold? Believe, my child, these last words that your father may, perhaps, address to you. I thought there was no risk; I thought the mare was sure to win, then I should have been released from my obligations to Sir Miles. How strange that the death of the animal should so well attune his purpose. Had he a hand in her death? No, it could not be. He was not in the stable five minutes and I was with him. Farewell, my children, I cannot face you, I cannot face the world, I must fly where neither tongue nor eye can reproach me. There is but one course open for me, it is very terrible, but it may lessen the sufferings of my children; above all, it may save my Florence. As for myself, no fate, no suffering, is too hard for my delinquences. It may, perhaps, be that in the time to come a reparation little expected may atone to my daughters for what my imprudence and extravagance may have made them suffer. One last word that wrings the heart for the tongue to utter, or the hand to write,—Farewell, farewell, my beloved, my ill-fated children. That the atonement he is about to offer may in part repair the mischief he has done, is the agonised prayer of him who scarce dares even to pray, your doting but unhappy father,

THOMAS AMERY."

The ravings of this deplorable letter were, when it was read at the inquest, supposed to point to the unfortunate man's intention of suicide.

The solicitor of Sir Miles Cressingham who was present to watch the proceedings on behalf of the Baronet, loudly inveighed at the terms in which his client was mentioned in the letter, and pointed out ingratitude as not the least among the vices of Mr. Amery. The abominable slander which in his letter the dead man had partially insinuated respecting the horse, had, observed the lawyer, been defeated by the verdict of the surgeons, and while partaking with his client in his sympathy for the unfortunate young ladies, the daughters of the deceased, he by no means shared in the forbearance which Sir Miles was disposed to exercise towards Mr. Amery's memory.

Sir Miles, according to the lawyer, was the most ill-used and generous of men. What meant Amery's allusions to his daughter Florence? The statement which he, the lawyer, was about to make might seem apart from the inquiry to the cause of Mr. Amery's death, but the name of Sir Miles had been so invidiously alluded to, in a letter which the writer must himself have known would be made public, that it was absolutely necessary in the discharge of his duty as the Baronet's legal adviser that he should make known what the conduct of Sir Miles had really been.

By Amery's own showing he was under just monetary obligations to Sir Miles. Instead of expressing any gratitude to his unequalled friend, he gracelessly asks why did he lend him his money. He, the lawyer, would tell the coroner and jury why Sir Miles had lent his money to Amery.

That unfortunate man had given bonds and bills to an immense amount to Messrs. Shadrack and Isaacson, of Aldgate; and when he was unable to discharge the bonds, or meet the bills, Sir Miles Cressingham generously advanced the large sum necessary, and released Mr. Amery from all obligations to the firm named; he, the lawyer, had been cognisant of the whole transaction, and had strongly advised his client against such indiscreet liberality. But Sir Miles would not be persuaded; he considered himself almost in the light of a son-in-law of Mr. Amery, and the latter had accepted him as the suitor of his youngest daughter.

"The letter which now lay before the coroner and jury, mentioned Miss Florence Amery as the proposed victim of Sir Miles. She might think it pretty and sentimental to think herself so, and her father in his malice and ingratitude towards the man to whom he owed so many favours might use a false expression, but the world at large, not only smaller people of middle age, but many young ladies, not inferior in attraction to Miss Florence Amery, would think the young lady whom Sir Miles with his large fortune, high social position, handsome person and accomplishments sought in marriage was anything but a victim.

"He could only say in conclusion, that Sir Miles in spite of the ungrateful slander of the deceased unfortunate gentleman was disposed still to exercise towards his daughters the same bounty he had shown to their late father."

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This artfully worded statement, and still more, the discovery that Mr. Amery was so deeply indebted to Sir Miles, prepossessed the world in favour of the latter, for the world will think that money covers everything, and that a man cannot have any just reason to complain of another who has obliged him with that supreme benefit.

The horror, grief, and consternation, of the daughters of the unfortunate Mr. Amery cannot be described: and it was with a sickening sense of some yet unknown and yet more dreadful evil that they learned that Sir Miles Cressingham, to whom their father was deeply indebted, would, as far as pecuniary matters were concerned, be in fact the arbiter of their destiny. Ellinor, the second daughter of Mr. Amery, a lovely young woman about twenty-four years of age, had all the energy and strong passions of her sister Alice without her vanity and frivolity; less gentle and timid than Florence, she was no less refined in her sentiments and stainlessly pure and chaste both in thought and deed.

In that galaxy of beauty Ellinor might, perhaps, have been singled out as less perfect in feature than her sisters. But her exquisitely pure though colourless complexion, the pure coral of her lips, the noble expanse of her broad white forehead, where thought and virtue seemed to sit enthroned, the abundance of the chestnut hair folded in massive coils round her classically shaped head, the changeful expression of her deep brown eyes, now melting with tenderness and anon glowing with indignation against all that was base and wicked, marked her face with higher attributes than were bestowed by mere color and correct outline.

Hence it was that many a connoisseur in female loveliness had declared that the piquante, and yet dignified Ellinor, with her slight but graceful figure, that so resembled the movements of the fawn, and her ever varying expression was the most beautiful of all the sisters.

Ellinor's attractions however were not of a nature to attract such a man as Sir Miles Cressingham. On his first introduction to the Amery family, indeed, he had been inclined to single out the Miss Ellinor as the idol of his devotions; but very few and brief interviews sufficed to show him she would be too intelligent. Ellinor had too much wit and good sense for the taste of Sir Miles, who even in a wife sought only a mere toy, or rather, licensed wanton, for that worse term only can truly describe the woman who suits the tastes of such a man as Sir Miles, and is contented to suit them.

From this witty, intellectual girl Sir Miles turned to the vain Alice, who in her turn he neglected the moment he became acquainted with Florence, who still more beautiful than Alice, was as intelligent as Ellinor, but without her keen wit and knowledge of the world to criticise him, and understand and despise his estimate of the sex of which he dared to think so meanly as to suppose it composed only of wantons framed to amuse the idle hours of such a debauchee as himself.

Sir Miles Cressingham, however, like all profligate men, was quite incapable of comprehending the character of any truly virtuous woman, whether she were wily as the serpent or simple as the dove.

It was fears and the dark experience of the world, of which, despite her seeming light-heartedness poor Ellinor had had a bitter lesson, that alone wrought the seeming difference between her and her sister Florence.

The intellectual powers of Florence were not inferior to those of Ellinor, but she was very young, little better than a child, and though like her sister she felt repulsed by something in the manners of Sir Miles, and in consequence thoroughly disliked him; her dislike was mingled with fear, while that of Ellinor was greatly lessened by her unmitigated and profound contempt. There is no creature whom a high minded woman so completely scorns, as the man whose mental and physical powers are devoted to a career of low pleasures; whose time and thoughts are wholly wasted to immoral women; who have no respect, as they have no understanding for virtue; and who, even when they marry, would have—

"Portia be Brutus' HARLOT, not his WIFE."

Sir Miles soon found with what contempt Ellinor Amery regarded him, and he returned that contempt with a dark and deadly hate.

He swore that he would bring her down from her high pedestal, that the statue, as he called her, white as marble and pure as half buds new blown, should be broken and defiled, and dragged through the mire at his feet.

"She has influenced Florence against me," he said, gnashing his teeth in a bitter soliloquy the day before the races. "She has jested with and aggravated the jealousy of Alice, she has dared despise me, she has told me so. Well, well, there is a heart yet I fancy within that seeming breast of ice; a warm passionate heart, that can yet be made to feel.

"I would have given half I am worth so to crush her pride as to make her mine; and this not in love but in hate and vengeance. But I give that up; she, devil that she is, did I venture to carry her off, would either stab or poison me, and life is far too precious now for me to risk it even for the supreme triumph of crushing the pride of Ellinor Amery. No, no, she will never be mine, but I will weave a net for her, she shall never escape; let but to-morrow crown my hopes, and the dolt of a father be fairly out of my way. There is the Marquis of Bridgenorth, I was of use to him in Italy, he worships this shrewd Ellinor. She knows not who he is, and he is the manner of man to suit the young lady's fancy, he has a wife already else I should fear the witch might charm him into marrying her. He has presented himself to her as a poor artist, and already made some impression. The downfall of her father will tame her pride, and I shall have the insolent girl at my mercy, I will taunt her with her own ruin yet."

The fiendlike hopes of Sir Miles Cressingham with regard to the ruin of the wretched Mr. Amery were but too well gratified, and though he could not have calculated on the suicide of his dupe no event could have been more acceptable to him.

So soon as the inquest on the body was over, and his character exalted, as he thought, by his solicitors eloquent statement of the obligations which Amery was under to him, than he preferred to act the part of the delicate considerate friend. The daughters of Mrs. Amery remained at the Cedars overwhelmed with affliction. The poor girls had no near relations, and but few friends: the distant connections that remained to them, on either their father or their mother's will, were all persons in the humbler walks of life, whom Sir Amery had shaken off in the days of his growing prosperity.

Sir Miles would fain have intruded upon the daughters for the present, he was informed that the Misses Amery's had placed all arrangements at the disposal of Lieutenant Herbert Mandeville.

"The meddling coxcomb!" muttered Sir Miles when the information was brought to him, "he thinks now that the old fool Amery is dead—that the obstacles twixt him and Florence are removed, and that some small dowry is yet left to her out of her father's wealth. Ah, ah, he little knows that the house in St. James's Square—the estate in Berkshire, the mansion of the Cedars, all are mine, that it may at my will and pleasure that the girls still retain the Cedars as a shelter for their heads, or have the liberty of receiving him beneath his roof. It would be a supreme revenge to send the bailiffs there at once. To send the six pretty birds at once out of their gilded cage, with only the gay plumage of their beauty to make their hiring by. But such a measure would be injudicious and unsafe. It would rob me of the good name which maidens' flib tongue has procured. It might here excite sympathy for the girls and raise up for them what would be called honourable friends, and that would spoil all my plans; no, patience, patience, yet a little longer!"

So it was that Sir Miles commanded himself not to call at the Cedars till after the interment of Mr. Amery, which took place in the church of the village near his home of the Cedars.

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Herbert Mandeville and his solicitor, with Ellinor and Florence alone, followed the unfortunate Mr. Amery to his grave. The despair and anguish of Alice, uncontrolled like all her emotions, had thrown her into a violent fever. The other three daughters of Mr. Amery, Adelina, Maud, and Clara, were a complete verification of the poet's assertion.—

"That most women have no characters at all."

They were beautiful, vain, frivolous, and hitherto harmless, for surrounded by luxury from their childhood with not a wish ungratified by their father, they have had no incentive to aid a bad feeling. They wept and were terrified at the fall of a parent whom they had all loved, but they had no apprehension what a bitter ordeal awaited them in their coming poverty.

It was about eleven o'clock, the morning after the funeral, Ellinor and Florence were sitting with Alice, who was still dangerously ill—Adeline, Maud, and Clara had not yet arrived—when Ellinor's waiting-maid brought her a note from Sir Miles, expressing his regret to hear that Miss Amery was so seriously indisposed, and begging that as she, the elder sister, was thus incapacitated by illness from attending to any business details, that Miss Ellinor would favour him with an interview.

Florence trembled and turned pale when her sister showed her this epistle, and implored her not to grant the request therein contained.

"I do not see, my dear, that I can well refuse," answered Ellinor. "Sir Miles makes business his plea; and you know, darling, that Herbert has heard sad reports of poor papa's transactions with Sir Miles."

"Then Sir Miles might entrust all business transactions to his solicitor," said Florence. "How dares he intrude here, or presume to think that any of us will see him after what dear papa said about him in his letter! Did he not call him a villain?"

Ellinor sighed.

"Alas! my dear Florence," she answered—"too many people are finding out that poor papa said that harm about Sir Miles because he was his heavy creditor. What you say about the lawyer though, little one, is correct: I should have thought of that myself. There is no reason why Sir Miles should intrude personally on us."

Ellinor sent down a message, requesting that Sir Miles would make his communications through Mr. Manders. The servant returned with a pencil note, in which Sir Miles stated that it was a point of extreme delicacy and friendship towards the Misses Amery that he had ventured to solicit a personal interview, which, for her sister's sake, he hoped Miss Ellinor would not refuse.

Ellinor now prepared to go down, against the earnest entreaties, however, of Florence.

"Do not be afraid, little one," said Ellinor, with a sad smile. "I am not the lamb whom this ogre seeks to drown."

"It is too bad!" muttered Alice, turning on her pillow, as Ellinor quitted the room. "Upon the strength of that single expression in poor dear papa's letter, you and Ellinor choose to look upon Sir Miles as the author of papa's dreadful end, and of all the misfortunes that threaten us. Poor papa!—it was quite true what Mr. Manders said on the inquest: it was his own imprudence that ruined him, and, like all unfortunate men, he grew angry with the very person who had been his best friend, because he owed him more money than he could pay. I pointed this out to Adeline yesterday, and she was entirely of my opinion."

"Adeline has no opinions!" answered Florence in a more determined tone than she had ever before said to her sister, "Adeline has no opinions, whatever be the point in question, they agree with the person who is thinking. And let me tell you Alice, I am more than shocked, I am horror-struck, that you should have one word to say in defence of a man, who your poor father had said drove him to self-destruction. Oh, poor,—poor papa. Oh Alice, how can you,—how can you?"

Florence would say no more, but covering my face with her handkerchief, she sobbed hysterically.

"I think," returned Alice fiercely, without any sorrow for the terrible fate of her parent. "I think Miss Florence Amery it would be as well for you to remember that I am your elder sister, ere you presume to sit in judgment upon word or action of mine; and so for that matter might Ellinor, who never forgets to remind me that I am older than her when it answers her to be impertinent, while she utterly fails in the respect which is on that account due to me."

"Ellinor's judgment is worth yours and mine, and that of all us put together," answered Florence warmly. Poor papa himself said that a thousand times; oh, well it would have been if he would have listened to her warning. Ellinor suspected that papa was exceeding his income, and I know more than once she begged of him to sell the Cedars and the house in town, and go and live wholly in the country."

"It was of a piece with her usual conceit, to presume to offer advice to her father," answered Alice. "She might have been contented too, to speak for herself, if she was willing to be moved up in the country, and die an old maid, because Harry Lawson jilted her to marry an heiress, its what I would never have consented to, neither I believe, would Adeline, Maud, or Clara."

"You talk very wildly!" returned Florence, and quite forget that since poor papa was totally ruined, we shall not have our choice as living anywhere, but must be well content to dwell where we can best earn our living, whether that be in town or country."

"Earn our living," exclaimed Alice, scornfully. "What go for a governess or a housemaid, I would as soon be the one as the other, and I would die rather than be either."

"You would sooner, perhaps, see Florence ere her poor father is yet cold in his blood-stained grave, become the wife of the man who drove him to his terrible end!" exclaimed Ellinor, who caught the words of Alice as she re-entered the room.

The face of Alice, which had hitherto been as white as the snowy sheets of her bed, flushed painfully as Ellinor spoke, and in a flattering tone she exclaimed—

"What do you mean?"

"Oh yes Ellinor what do you mean?" reiterated Florence in an accent of terror.

"I mean," answered Ellinor fixing her calm brown eyes with something of scorn upon the changing countenance of Alice, "I mean that the recreant lover of your sister Alice, do not look so angry Alice you know he was your lover, aye and that in spite of his insolent faithlessness to you, so soon as he met your youngest sister, your heart clings to him still. Oh shame Alice, shame; have you no pride, nor self-respect? Surely you will crush down this unworthy, this debasing love for Sir Miles Cressingham now that, after having driven your father unto death itself, he dares demand that Florence should at once become his wife, on which condition he will graciously allow to each of her sisters an income of fifty pounds a-year! You will live luxuriously on such a stipend, Alice – will you not?" said Ellinor, pointing to the toilet-table of her sister, with its glittering gold-topped glagons, filled with rare and costly essences—its drapery of point lace, over azure silk—and thrown down on it, carelessly, those gorgeous trifles which are necessaries with the vain women of fashion: a mother-of-pearl fan, pierced to resemble lace, and the handle decorated with emeralds; a gold-mounted opera glass, set with diamonds; tablets of ivory and gold; and a gold pencil-case, to note engagements in a ball-room.

"You will want none of these things, my dear Alice, after Florence becomes Lady Cressingham, and we enter upon our income of fifty pounds per year. It will, perhaps, be advisable to sell them to increase your stipend. I believe Sir Miles cannot take any of our personal property away—neither our trinkets, nor our clothes. He is contemptible enough in his villany even for that, if the law would allow it; and would, I verily believe, sell your velvet and brocades, and have you attire that queenly person of yours in linsey wolsey. Oh! Alice, Alice," ex-

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claimed the high-spirited girl—passing from the tone of satire which she had used to one of deep indignation—"if my heart had ever so deceived me, as to throb with one impulse of love for this man, for one poor second of time, I would tear it from my bosom—I would."

"Leave me!" exclaimed Alice, hysterically: "you are too cruel, Ellinor, in your sagacity. Oh! I would not have thought—I would not have believed—this of him had he told me so himself. Oh! you have never loved, Ellinor—you have never truly loved—or you would know that we do not love from will, but from a destiny, or spell, which tyrannously charms us, and compels us to love even an object most ungrateful and unworthy."

"Indeed, such a love as this I have never known," answered Ellinor, "and I trust in heaven that I never shall."

"But you will, you will," cried Alice impetuously, "your love for Harry Lawrence did not deserve the name."

"I meant to love when I learnt to despise him," said Ellinor. "But there was a time when I loved him truly."

"No more, never!" exclaimed Alice. "We understand each other better than ourselves. You read the conflicting passions that torture me, but you are ignorant of your own. I tell you Ellinor, and the spirit of prophecy in this is upon me, that the time shall come when you too will be borne away, and see the landmarks of reason, virtue, self-respect, all borne away by the surging torrent of an ungovernable love. You think that your clear intellect, your powerful mind shall save you. It will not, Ellinor, it will not; none so irritable a fool in the infatuation of a real passion as the woman who has despised the fetters of love; for her weakness then is great in proportion to her previous strength. Such a passion will, I know, sooner or later be yours; and then, then, as you have cared so to insult me, in your folly I will find my revenge. Now leave me, leave me if you please, it is surely not too much to ask to be alone."

Ellinor made no reply to this bitter speech; did her heart respond to its accusations; did the shadow of a fear of some infatuated weakness to which she might yet submit, cast its glamour for a brief space over her proud and noble soul?

Her head drooped upon her bosom. Then recovering herself she wound her arm round the waist of Florence.

"Come, my dear," she said, "Sir Miles will take the answer to his suit, his demand, perhaps, I should rather call it, given in no lips save your own."

Florence shrank back in terror.

"Oh no, no, dear Ellinor," she said, I cannot I will not see that dreadful man."

"Nay dearest, do not give him the triumph of thinking that you fear him so much that you dare not say no to his vile offers."

With these words Ellinor drew Florence from the room leaving their eldest sister to her own bitter thoughts.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PARIAHS OF LONDON—THE BOOZING KEN OF THE RIVER PIRATES NEAR RATCLIFF HIGHWAY—THE FEMALE OUTCASTS, FLASH CARRY, AND CRAZY JANE—THE LASCAR SAILORS AND THE BRITISH TAR.

RATCLIFF HIGHWAY, now dignified with the mere cognomen of "Giant George Strat," was at the time of which we write, the haunt of such desperate characters, that the respectable inhabitants of the locality, people connected with the shipping, masters of merchantmen, ship chandlers, sail makers, and others whose business connected with the maritime importance of the country, were sometimes in terror of their lives.

Foreign, as well as English sailors, populated the noisome courts and alleys which winding off from Ratcliffe Highway into Shadwell; and down to the banks of the river.

Of the foreign sailors an undue proportion consisted of Malays or Lascars, as they were more commonly called, and who worked their passage to England on board her own last Indiamen. These Lascars are a fierce and murderous race. They are the people who in their fits of insane fury will draw the creese, a kind of long dagger which they wear, and stab indiscriminately any unfortunate who happens to cross their path. Fifty years ago it was not uncommon for these wretches when celebrating with wild orgies the feasts of the Hindoo gods whom they worshipped, to become so excited that they broke out into fearful rioting. Then the peaceful inhabitants of the district were compelled to shut their houses and close their shops, while the streets run with blood, as the Lascars rushing through them wounded themselves or others with their long knives; and this hideous scene would last till the military were summoned from the Tower, the murderous miscreants setting the civil authorities at utter defiance.

At the top of a narrow street or rather alley, branching from the main artery of Ratcliff Highway in the direction of Wapping Stairs, there stood at the period referred to a public-house yclept the "Jolly Tar," upon which the police of the day, a very different force to the intelligent and well-organized men who now keep our rabble of the overgrown metropolis in wholesome check, had long held watch, and yet had been unable to charge the landlord with any overt act which would deprive him of his license.

"The jolly tar," as depicted in the sign that hung over the door, did not look jolly at all, in fact, he had a seedy broken aspect, as if the much despised mannseer, or or mynheer the Dutchman, had given him a sound good thrashing. Nevertheless the sound was seductive, and many a time as Poor Jack, came rolling into Wapping from the merchantmen, with his pay in his pocket, he would look up at the "Jolly Tar," shake his head at his dilapidated appearance, and then jingling his shiners career over the threshold, and call for the best the landlord could sell for the good of the service.

Then, when he so entered the "Jolly Tar," did he verify the saying of that witty, profligate, good-for-nothing, better-liked-than-he-deserved-to-be-monarch, Charles the Second—"that having earned his money like a horse, spent it most egregiously like an ass!"

There was vile liquor, and filthy packs of cards, that on touching, almost stick to the fingers, and there was a skittle ground and even a dice-box at the "Jolly Tar," and if poor Jack, which was not often the case, withstood all those temptations, there were some frail members of the fair sex, who were on good terms with Mathew Stedman, the landlord, who were willing to lend their aid, in ruining Jack. As members of the fair sex, of course, they were all fair, and we may be permitted perhaps to add, they were very, very frail.

The night after that portentous race at Newmarket, which had resulted in the suicide of Mr. Amery, was wet and stormy.

The season was one of those in which the climate of England asserts its caprice, when winter returning, "Throw his snows into the fresh lip of the crimson rose," the wind wailed along the dark and dirty streets of Wapping and Ratcliff Highway.

There were no gas lamps in those days, and the cotton wick drenched in rank oil, the miserable precursor of that brilliant invention, threw a feeble light upon the blue, cold, and pinched faces of the passengers—who wrapping their garments round them, hastened to their warm firesides, or to any sheltering night-houses, out of the storm of sleet and rain, and the blasts of the cruel north wind.

In the tap-room of the "Jolly Tar," there was light and warmth, and of a certain sort, hilarity. An enormous fire blazed in the huge stove, and its flames were waving up the wide chimney, spattering and fighting with the sleet and rain that sometimes pattered down on them, for the "Jolly Tar" was a tenement, only one story high.

The house was spacious, notwithstanding, and had originally been built for other purposes than those of public entertainment. It had not been erected later than the time of James the First, the high slanting roof was

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covered with red tiles, and projected more than a foot beyond the upper story, affording abundant space for the nests of a whole colony of those most audacious of birds the London sparrow, who, cocks, or hens, are equally impudent.

Under this ugly pent house of a roof blinked and twinkled a long row of little casement windows, in which very small squares of bad greenish glass were set in very wide frames of lead, as if the design of the builder or architect had been to treat the sun himself as a burgler, and defy him to secure an entrance. An apparently strange fancy since people like in general to enjoy the light they pay for, and an evil which, since the tenancy of Mathew Stedman had been further promoted by the uncleanly habits of his woman-kind; who seemed intent on fostering the filth on the gloomy casements, which were literally coated with dust and smoke, and the sun in the upper apartments always had an appearance of shining through a fog.

As before said, the house was spacious, it had been built in unquiet times both political and religious. In spite its appearance of craziness it was perfectly sound and would have stood another hundred years. The oaken beams that supported the roof of the long kitchen would have built a modern dwelling-house. In the roof, in the back of the dark closets, in the thickness of the walls were strange hiding places, which had by turns served to conceal the hunted Catholic priest, or the Non-conformist, and when Puritanism was in the ascendant under Cromwell, and showed its superior humanity and spirit of freedom by a raid against the clergy of the established church, a clergyman obnoxious as a fast friend of Archbishop Laud, was was for some weeks safely concealed in those hiding places.

To far different ones were the secret nooks of that old house afterwards applied, instead of the political and religious offenders of the Stewarts, and the Commonwealth, the social culprits of the days of George the third too often were sheltered there from the due punishment of their crimes. The burglar, the highwayman, the footpad, sometimes even the murderer, red handed from his victim hidden in some dark recess of the "Jolly Tar" defied the utmost vigilance of the officers of police, for Stedman had hitherto cunningly contrived to elude detection as to the character of the customers who were his greatest source of gain, and the "Jolly Tar," merely passed with all, save some keen officers, as a very low public house, where the sailors got drunk and were cheated, and where, from the admixture of turbulant foreigners, especially the Malays from the India and China ships there was not unfrequently a disturbance, which ended in some of the parties therein engaged passing a night at the watchhouse and making their appearance at the Thames Police-court the next morning.

A rather large party were assembled in the tap-room of the "Jolly Tar" on the night in question. Some half-dozen of sailors, just landed from a West India merchantman, were conversing at a table near the fire. Two of them were engaged playing with dirty cards at the renowned game of All Fours, with a couple of fellows who had the appearance of costermongers, but who were secretly members of a band of daring cracksmen.

The other English sailors were betting eagerly on their friends; and, as they had all imbibed rather more than a reasonable quantity of steaming grog, compounded of strong Scotch whiskey, lemons, and sugar, they were somewhat reckless in their ventures.

The Lascar sailors also stood watching the game, with the intense anxiety of inveterate gamblers. Their white teeth, from which the lips were drawn back, like those of a tiger about to pounce upon its prey, glittered in strange contrast to their dusky faces; while their eyes gleamed like burning coals.

The sailors lost their game, and dashed down their money with an oath—called for more grog, and swore that they would have another hand round, on the chance of better luck. The burglars, of course, readily agreed to give the sailors a chance of revenge, which they knew was a certainty of more plunder to themselves.

"Avast, avast! Bob," said one of the sailors who had been betting, and who was not quite so drunk as his companions, taking a fresh quid of tobacco from his box—"I think it's high time as we turned out of this house. You know as we promised Master Sterling, our mate, as we'd meet him at the "George," down by the Old Stairs, to-night. That was to be at ten o'clock; and it's half-arter nine now, you sees."

The man pointed as he spoke to the old eight day clock which stood in a corner of the tap room, the face of which loomed out from the clouds of smoke from the pipes, and staem from the hot liquor.

"Oh, you be blowed, Ben Banning;" said the worthy addressed as Bob. "I don't stir my stumps till I has some of my money back from these coves; I wants it to buy my old mother a new gown afore I toddles home to Hampshire. And here you landlord skipper," he shouted referring to Mr. Stedman's eyes with an expression that was not a blessing, "more grog, and douse my glim. I'll rob you if its such rot gut, fire water stuff as the last."

"Better start at once, Bob," said Ben Banning, "you are more like to lose every blessed shiner as you've got left to these coves than get back them you have lost already."

The faculties of Ben Banning were not quite so much inflamed as those of his companion, and he had a vague perception that the strangers did not play fair.

"Does you mean to say as ve vos a cheatin of the sailor gemman?" said one of the costermongers scowling at Ben.

"No I does'nt," answered Ben, "but if so be as I choose to say it, it isn't a dozen of such shoregoing lubbers as you as should hinder me saying it."

As Ben spoke he hitched his trowsers, took a swig of grog, and banged his clenched hand, which was about the color of mahogany and the size of a trencher, with such force upon the table that he set the bottles and tin drinking cans dancing.

The two burglars, who were both slight made men with the soddened complexions and thin hollow faces resulting from a low London life of debauchery, looked uneasily at Ben.

He was a fine athletic fellow about the middle height, dressed in the sailor's costume of the day, a pair of canvass trowsers, a blue jacket, and his brown hair long and twisted in a cue tied with black ribbon and hanging down his back; his bronzed face beaming with health and good humour, bore the impress of dauntless resolution, and was furthermore adorned with a pair of fine blue eyes, a set of fine white teeth, and most luxuriant formidable whiskers.

His companions though inferior to Ben in good looks, were all stout determined fellows, and the burglars not thinking by any means prudent to provoke hostilities, with such odds against them, swallowed Ben's obnoxious observations, and played more fairly while his eye was upon them. This was not long, as his attention was presently attracted to a new comer.

This last was a herculean ruffianly-looking man, about six feet high, attired in velveteen breeches, hob-nailed shoes, and worsted stockings, with a grey coat, and red handkerchief tied loosely round the short, thick, bull-like throat.

A hat very much the worse for wear, was set rakishly on one side of this worthy's head, and a chain with the red tint that denotes copper dangled from his fob, supporting a silver watch about the size of a turnip, which the man pulled out and compared with the clock, as he entered the tap-room.

He just glanced at the party near the fire, and then calling for some brandy and water, lounged into a remote corner of the room, and sat down leaning his head on his hand.

Presently Stedman himself brought him the brandy and water, placing it on the table, at which the man sat,

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HERBERT MANDEVILLE PROTECTING FLORENCE FROM SIR MILES CRESSINGHAM.

"Want the cribs to night?" whispered the landlord.

"No," answered the man, in a sulky tone, laying down pipe in silence.

The landlord indulged in a low chuckle.

"Why, what's the matter," he whispered again. "Is it yourself or sombeody else, what Blustering Bill, the smasher, down in the mouth?"

Blustering Bill was in a very bad humour.

"Don't you talk of 'down in the mouth,' Matt Stedman," he growled forth, in an under-tone of voice. "It's enough to chaw up any feller to see all sorts of fools and asses, what haven't half his pluck, getting their heads above his'n, It's a cursed bad world—that's what it is. You'll see—you'll see, Matt—a chap as I was to meet here will be in presently. A bang-up swell—a regular toff—he is: and yet he didn't start in life a bit better nor me. But he's got on by all sorts of mean prewaricating ways—by leaving bold fellers, such as I, to do the work what brings us acquainted with the beaks and the darbies, whilst he sucked up all the profits, just as a alderman sucks down his turtle. Oh! it's a stupid world—it's a bad world—Matt Stedman."

The landlord of the "Jolly Tar" did not dispute his customers moral conclusion, for the long practice of Mr. Blustering Bill could hardly have continued if the world had been good, so he turned away with a low chuckle to answer the demands of the sailors for more liquor.

"Oh," muttered Blustering Bill, eyeing him from under his beetle brows, "you is another that's tarred with the same brush, you is; you as got your strong box with the rale shiners got out of the chances of such a poor devil as I am having a swing from the leafless tree. Well Mr. Matt Steadman, you has your money, but though you is born you is not buried!"

Had Matt, the landlord of the "Jolly Tar," seen the look of deadly ferocity which the man directed at him as he uttered the last word, it would have checked in him all disposition to hilarity.

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But he did not see it, for at that moment new guests appeared, in the persons of two women, one of whom led by the hand a girl of from twelve to fourteen years of age.

The child and the woman who, from the striking resemblance between them appeared to be her mother, were only meanly clad. Not so their companion. In spite of the inclement night her apparel was of the richest materials and gayest colors. A dress of amber satin tucked up and showing a quilted petticoat of black silk, a capuchin cloak of fine scarlet cloth with gold cords and tassels, and lined with white satin, and a black velvet hat with a long scarlet and white feather. A thick necklace or rather chaplet of gold heads exquisitely wrought in Indian fillagree, hung round this woman's neck, and almost every finger on her plump white hand glittered with rings; some set with such inferior stones as the garnet and amethyst, others of great value.

In personal appearance this woman did not misbecome her gaudy and expensive attire. Her beauty was of the buxom class. She was above the middle height with a finely developed bust, tapering towards the waist. Her limbs were well moulded, and perhaps the silk petticoat was a trifle shorter than it need have been, in order to display a well-shaped foot and ancle that became the smart scarlet silk stockings and high heeled shoes with their large silver buckles.

"What, Flash Carry, my rose of Wapping, my star of the east, how comes it, that you shine out from the clouds to night!" exclaimed Mathew Stedman, approaching the woman, and offering to remove her wet cloak, while he tried to ogle her with a pair of blear eyes.

"Come, don't tip us any of your gammon, you old sinner," said the woman, whose real name was Caroline Andrews, but who was more generally known as Flash Carry, from the richness of her attire, in which she had indulged since she had won the affections of a Lascar, named Hamet, who had possessed himself of considerable wealth, it was probable, by dishonest means, since he was known to be associated in business matters with Matthew Stedman.

Caroline Andrews, more wretched than she herself was aware in the depths of infamy, to which she had fallen, had originally been a young girl from the country, who, taking service in London, succumbed very quickly to the snares which her beauty and her humble position subjected her to. This beauty she still retained, even after a career of the lowest profligacy, preserving even the brilliant red and white of her complexion, in spite of late hours, drink, and until she met her East Indian admirer, a rather long space of hard living. Fair haired, and with bright bold eyes of a limpid sapphire blue, Flash Carry might have sat to Reubens for one of his burly Flemish beauties.

By the man Hamet she was supported in coarse luxury, and there were members of the wretched sisterhood, to which she belonged, who envied her as bitterly for having captivated this savage Malay, as young women of character sometimes envy in their acquaintance a fortunate and wealthy marriage.

Yet those poor creatures well knew that Flash Carry encountered fearful peril, in the fenzied passion of her fierce lover, that like all his race he was madly jealous, and the probable termination of Flash Carry's career would be the point of her lover's dagger in her heart.

"What a hole is this place of yours Mr. Steadman," said the woman taking off her hat and shaking the wet from the feather "a pretty commence, that ladies the like's of me and my friends here, could not get a coach near your door, and have been obliged to puddle down the filthy street!"

"Oh, my beauty!" exclaimed Stedman," if ever I gets to be a richer man I'll get into a wider street for your accommodation!"

The landlord, as he spoke again, tried to look lovingly at the young woman. Unfortunately neither his years nor his aspect fitted him to play the lover's part, and Flash Carry insted of being smitten with a reciprocal tenderness, laughed and swore at him for an old fool. In reply to this the landlord clasped her round the waist, and tried to kiss her, and was rewarded for the attempt by a ringing box on the ears.

The handsome Carry had a little dash of the devil in her composition, and nothing more enrages and disgusts a pretty woman, whether her morals be good or bad, than the familiar approach of a man who is disagreeable to her. "I'll tell you what it is, old fellow," she exclaimed, in a high sharp tone, while the spectators whose attention had been roused, laughed at the landlord's discomfiture. "I'll tell you what it is, my furrin chap Hamet ain't no great matter to look at, nor has he any great amount of muscle for English fighting. But if he can't box he can stab, and so sure your alive old man, the next time as you dares to touch me, Hamet shall pay you with an inch or two of cold steel. Ugh, if I want to kiss and be cuddled by an ape, there's a many of the captains down Poplar and Limehouse as brings them home from the Indies, and I dares to say I could borrow one what would be a deal better looking nor you, and younger into the bargain!"

A roar of laughter from all present greeted this speech, for the aspect of old Stedman was one that would almost have justified the Scotch Lord Monboddo's eccentric fancy that men were akin to the monkeys and originally wore tails.

Age so venerable, and so beloved, when man is worthy of his own high place, was loathsome and revolting in Matthew Stedman.

A large projecting jaw, lips swelled and protuberant, and of a deep purple tint, a nose that was a caricature of an Israelite's, a bald retreating forehead and a few grey and sandy heirs about the neck and ears, presented a head in which the lowest animal instincts were strongly developed.

Stedman affected to take Flash Carry's rough usage in good part, but a more deadly vow than Blustering Bill had recorded against him, did he register for the award of Caroline Andrews. Meantime the woman and child who accompanied her, scared by the noise and confusion, and by her sharp contest with Stedman had shrunk away into a far corner of the room, where they both stood trembling they knew not wherefore. Having, as she considered, finally settled the presumptuous admiration of Mr. Stedman, Flash Carry looked round for her companions.

They had shrunk into the background the woman keeping fast hold of her child, and glancing timidly round as though in fear of some mortal enemy. The features of the woman, whose age might have been about three and thirty, were ghastly pale and attenuated, as if with want, but their perfect outline remained, and though the large black eyes were wild and unsettled in their glances they still retained their liquid lustre; the hair once black as the raven's wing was untimely streaked with silver threads that glittered amid its ebon waves like the moonbeams through a thunder-cloud.

The figure of this unfortunate, somewhat below the middle height, was sadly wasted, but it still preserved its natural elegance, and as she bent over her child glancing fearfully at the faces of those around her, attitude had the grace of a startled fawn. Her garments were miserably thin, and from the manner in which the damp cotton gown wrapped about her, it was evident she had no warm under clothing.

As to the child, she promised already to possess a beauty as rare as that of her mother had once been; a complexion, shape, and features, which might have been the original for a Venus or Psyche of Italian painters, as excellent as that of Caroline Andrews for the before mentioned Flemish beauty.

Only one difference existed between the child and her mother, and that was one which would have crowned her attractions in the eyes of a Venetian painter, and this was that her hair was of that light reddish brown interlaced as it were with pure gold thread, which is the true auburn.

By a charming caprice of nature instead of the blue eyes which are invariably supposed to associate with the glittering auburn hair, the eyes of the girl were of

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the same large, melting, houri-like black that lighted up the pale face of her mother.

The attire of the poor child was little better than that of her parent, consisting of an old brown stuff frock much too short, broken shoes through the holes in which could be seen her poor little naked feet for she had no stockings, and an old battered straw hat, the rim of which was torn away, so that it afforded no screen for the little gem of a rose and lily face beneath it.

This poor child and her mother were well known in that dreadful locality, they had harboured there for years, sometimes scantily supported by creatures almost as poor as themselves, at others better fed, from the profuseness of some Pariah of London who having made what he called "a lucky haul," in the parlance of honest folks, some daring robbery, devoted part of his ill-gotten gains to a merciful use, and supported Crazy Jane, as she was called, and her child for a week.

If in the souls of the best and noblest of those who exalt with their virtue, or enlighten with their genius, this world of suffering and sin, there is yet some dark shade, some taint of the serpent's trail, so, in the most depraved, the most abandoned and wicked, there is the relenting thought, the momentary gleam of heaven's light upon the darkened soul, the throbbing of generous tenderness for the seared heart.

None so wild, none so bad, even among the brutalized creatures, who herded in the vicinage of the "Jolly Tar," that they would have lifted a finger to hurt Crazy Jane and her child, upon whom with that instinct of poverty, so strongly lurking among the uncultivated and vicious, they had in their baptism of misery, bestowed the pure name of "Snowdrop."

Ten years before, Crazy Jane, with her little offspring, then an infant of about a year and a half or two years old, were found upon a door step, in Ratcliffe Highway. Both the mother and child were then elegantly clad. They were conveyed to the workhouse, and carefully attended, but the mother was found to be hopelessly insane, and quite incapable of giving any clue as to her name or condition in life. She would babble for hours of a lost and perfidious lover, yet never mentioned his name or place of abode, nor could any device of doctor or nurse extract it from her. If questioned closely she would assume a terrified look, whisper of danger to the life of her child, and gathering it in her arms retreat to some dark corner where she would cower over it, and neither speak nor taste food for the remainder of the day. Confinement and restraint seemed to terrify this poor creature beyond all else; whenever she could find an opportunity she would escape from the workhouse, and when brought back would go off into fits of raving madness.

The parish authorities, by whose orders the elegant garments of Jane and her child had been carefully preserved with a view of at some future time aiding to establish their identity, finding the woman so impatient of restraint, and that, moreover, their repeated advertisements respecting her remained unanswered, allowed her at last to stray about the neighbourhood at her pleasure, accompanied by her child, from whom it was impossible to separate her.

The old ballad of "Crazy Jane" was at that time popular, and the epithet was conferred upon the poor woman because she had lost her wits, and was perpetually bemoaning a false lover. Among the lost and wretched outcasts, who out of their own wretchedness had alleviated the still greater wretchedness of poor Jane, "Flash Carry" was one; and many a night when hurrying to her own miserable lodging, she had denied herself the pennyworth of gin for which she craved to warm her chilled limbs and blunt her appetite, that she might purchase a roll for "Crazy Jane" and her child.

After the violent passion which the fierce and wealthy Lascar conceived for her had surrounded "Flash Carry" with abundance, "Crazy Jane" and Snowdrop never wanted food when Caroline was informed of their whereabouts.

But Jane's movements had latterly been very erratic, and for the first time since she had appeared in the locality, she had been absent for above two months, the morning after the Newmarket races she had returned, both herself and Snowdrop minus the warm clothing which Caroline had given them in the beginning of the winter.

Jane herself, however, appeared strangely altered, and it was with difficulty the child had induced her to call with her at Flash Carry's lodgings.

The child's account was, that her mother had wandered away with her many miles into the country; that their warm clothing had been sold to procure food; and that at length they came to a grand house, with beautiful grounds all about it. That in spite of all that she, Snowdrop, could do or say to persuade her to the contrary, Jane would persist, in knocking at the door of this great house, which she said was Snowdrop's own.

And then proceeded poor little Snowdrop, the door was opened by a fine gentleman in beautiful yellow breeches, and with a lot of fine gold stuff on his white coat, and for all she could do, Jane would repeat her foolish story: "and then you know dear Carry, it was no wonder," concluded the child, crying, "the gentleman laughed at poor mother, and when she wouldn't go away he got very angry, and he called out some other gentleman, and they let loose a great dog and set him at us, and he tore our clothes, and though we ran as fast as we could, he would have killed us both, if we had not come up to another house, a small pretty house all covered with green leaves, at the end of the long winding road with great trees on each side of it that led up to the great one, and an old lady came out of his house and scolded the gentleman very much for setting the dog at us, and she took us in, and gave us some cold meat and bread, and she seemed sorry when I told her how p or mother had lost her wits, and she gave me some money, and told me to get mother back to London as soon as I could; and oh, dear, Carry, I have had such trouble to make her come; and she will keep it in her head that the same home should be mine."

"Had small doubts but what it is," muttered Carry to herself, "the poor crazed thing she hasn't been when she were young, a poor servant such as the likes of me. No, no, Jane have been a lady born, I'll take my oath, whether she have been foled by some bad feller or no'. For ladies is fools that way sometimes I've heard, just like poor ignorant gals, for all their edicat on.

Flash Carry was far too shrewd to tell Snowdrop what she thought, but she formed a scheme in her own mind to try and find out who were really the relations of little Snowdrop; and it was in furtherance of this scheme that the lad visited the "Jolly Tar," and brought Snowdrop and Crazy Jane with her.

Flash Carry wanted the child to tell the story of her journey into the country to Mathew Stedman. She had a great opinion of the old man's sagacity. She knew very well that avarice and licentiousness contended for the mastery in his depraved soul, and as it was in her power to reward him well, she meant to engage him to make inquiries among the thieves and burglars who frequented his house, and who in their constant journeying about the country would, she thought, be able to discover from the description given by Snowdrop the house to which her mother had taken her.

It was not with that wish to herself that Flash Carry had visited the "Jolly Tar," for her Malay lover was so furiously jealous that he was capable of charging her with an intrigue even with a man so old and repulsive as Mathew Stedman.

Ordering some wine, and giving a glass of it to the trembling Jane, Flash Carry in as few words as possible, made Stedman acquainted with the service which she acquired from him.

"But, my dear," said the old wretch lifting his eyes to Carry's face with an expression, that provoked from her so fierce a glance that he immediately lowered them.

"What does it matter to you about the kindness? What does it matter to you that little Snowdrop should be made a baby of? Why should she not then live with us?"

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"Because she is too pretty, too good!" replied the woman flushing to her temples, "because if she stays among us before another year is out she will be like us; like Slashing Fanny; like Lushy Loo, like *me*!"

"Like you, my dear, oh, oh, oh," said the landlord rubbing his hands and laughing till the salt rheum stood in his green eyes, "like you my dear, and what better could she be like. Ain't you the most beautifullest woman atwixt Limehouse and London-bridge; hasn't you a smart lodging, and plenty of the best to eat and drink, and don't you dress in silks and satins, and go so fine that they calls you Flash Carry. Not like to you indeed, why should she be any better!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha," laughed Carry, a bitter miserable laugh, "that was what Slashing Fan said one day, why should that ere chit be better than us"—"I'll tell you why Mathew Stedman, but don't stare at me so with your green eyes, you looks so unkimmon like an old goat!"

Mr. Stedman was a man, though an old and very ugly one, and when the poet wrote the famous line—

"Hell has no fury like a woman scorned,"

he might have added "nor a man either," and have increased the force and truth of his sentiment.

Mr. Stedman was wroth at Carry's sneers, so without appearing, to notice them, he answered spitefully.

"I doesnt care my dear whether the kinchin turns out better nor worse off nor you are, you can make a fool of yourself about her if you likes, only if as how you expects Matthew Stedman to trouble himself about her you must be ready to dubb up the dibbs, for I am a very poor man Carry dear, a very poor old man!"

"Don't you tell no lies Mathew Stedman," returned Carry sharply, "you is not poor—you has plenty of rale golden guineas in your strong box; and I am going to give you five or ten more to join them if so be as you answers my purpose."

"Hush, hush, my darling, my lady bird," said the old man in a choking whisper, glancing over his shoulder at Blustering Bill, who had sat in silence glaring on the old man and Caroline, and straining his ears to catch the purport of their whispered conference.

"I have no guineas, no strong box!"

"Now ain't you?" retorted Carry, "if I had as much money as you have, I wouldn't be the miserable wretch I am, trembling at the step of that black devil Hamet, and waking up in a cold presperation o' nights expecting his knife at my throat.

"Oh if I was rich—if I was rich," ejaculated the poor wretch clasping her hands, and speaking half in soliloquy, "Oh would'nt I have done with that fiend from the Ingees, and take little Snowdrop away, and take care that she should never, never be what I have been, what I am, what I am!"

The last words died away almost in a wail, and Flash Carry sat silent, and looking as if the descriptive adjective had been very foolishly applied.

Old Stedman indulged in a laugh.

"Well Carry," he said, "I did not think as you had been such a fool. What matter to you about Snowdrop?"

"She shall never be what I am, never;" repeated Flash Carry.

Stedman laughed again; and Blustering Bill suddenly starting up advanced to the table before which the old man and Carry were sitting.

"She is right in what she says old man," exclaimed the coiner, "she is right;" then turning sharply on the woman he said, "Look at me, Caroline Andrews, look at me, have you quite forgotten William Conway?"

At the sound of that name the woman started up, and shrieking wildly fell on her knees before the truculent looking ruffian who addressed her, she gasped, rather than spoke the words;—

"Oh, no no; you, you William Conway, my best and earliest lover, the pride of our village, the best and blithest youth on Watson's farm. Oh, no, no, you are not William Conway."

"I am what was William Conway," answered the man, "what he is now, you have made him."

What further either of reproach or reconcilement that might have ensued between the pair who, vil age lovers in the innocence of youth, had now so miserably encountered in the hey-day of crime, was prevented by the sudden entrance of two more visitors of the "Jolly Tar."

One of the strangers was a remarkably handsome young man in the officer-like dress of the first mate of a merchant man.

The other was a man about forty years of age, whose sharp aquiline features and olive skin denoted the Malay.

The style of this person was oriental both in fashion and splendour. His loose trowsers fastened at the ancle were of white cashmere, his jacket was of crimson velvet wrought with gold, a girdle of gold tissue encircled his waist, and the crooked yataghan slung at his side, and the dagger in his girdle, were mounted in gold and set with precious stones. The wealth of an Oriental consists in a great measure of these fineries.

The officer of the merchantman walked up to the table at which the sailors were still engaged with the dirty cards.

The gorgeously attired Asiatic on the other hand, who was followed by the Lascar sailor, who had slipped from the room on the entrance of Flash Carry, sprung like an enraged tiger on the kneeling woman, and dragging her to her feet, drew his long sharp dagger which he would have buried in her bosom, but for the interposition of the merchantman's mate, who, seizing the wrists of the light limbed Malay, held him prisoner with a muscular power against which, the latter was wholly unable to contend, though he twisted and writhed like a wounded snake in the grasp of his athletic conqueror.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MALAY LOVER—THE BRITISH SAILOR—THE MANIAC AND HER CHILD—THE STRANGE VISITOR AT THE JOLLY TAR—THE MALAY'S VENGEANCE.

As the Malay still continued to struggle, swearing in Hindustanee and broken English, that he would have the life of his mistress, the sailors, and the men with whom they had been playing at cards came to the assistance of Tom Starling, the mate of the West India merchantman, Jupiter, who had seized the furious wretch.

With great difficulty they succeeded in depriving him of his weapon, and when having done so they released him, he threw himself on the floor and howled and foamed with rage.

The woman stood by gazing sullenly at him, but without exhibiting the fear which would have been natural.

Suddenly Hamet ceased his cries, and starting up, looked eagerly at Starling, who was speaking apart to his sailors, whom he had been at some trouble to hunt up at the "Jolly Tar."

The merchantman's mate was a young man about twenty-three years of age, and as fine a specimen of a handsome, jovial British sailor as ever stepped upon a plank. The unreasoning jealousy of the fierce Asiatic which had in the first instance, most absurdly fixed itself upon the old and ugly landlord of the public-house, now fastened upon Tom Starling for its object.

That the young man had prevented his murdering the woman, he imputed to an understanding between them. Flash Carry was not aware that her terrible paramour kept more than one of his countrymen in his pay for no other purpose than to watch her movements. One of these men it was who had slipped away from the tap room of the "Jolly Tar" on the entrance of the young woman and hurried to tell Hamet where she was to be found.

Though no action of this fierce Oriental's life was ever prompted by reason, mere cunning being the sole curb of his savage instincts, the jealousy which, with the vivacity of Eastern imagination he instantly transferred from Matthew Stedman to Tom Starling, was on the face of it less absurd; for the young sailor, to a fine person united a remarkably handsome face, and a frank dashing manner, gifts which, as they excited the love and admira-

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tion of the other sex, had not unfrequently provoked for him an equal amount of envy and hatred from his own.

The prodigality of an Oriental imagination, however, must alone have suggested that because a handsome man had saved an equally handsome woman from the blow of a dagger that therefore they had met before.

After surveying Tom Starling with a quick eager glance, wherein he noted the athletic well-moulded frame, the ruddy tint glowing through the tanned cheek, and contrasting with the whiteness of the broad forehead from which the curls of chestnut hair were carelessly dashed aside, he felt nervously about his garments as if in search of the weapon of which he had been deprived. Then he bowed his head and folded his arms upon his breast, and uttered a low sob, as the tears burst from his eyes, the comparison between that noble manly figure, and his own slight meagre frame, that handsome expressive face with its bold blue eyes and light complexion, and his sharp dusky features, was too bitter, and broke him down, he wept the scalding tears of envy. A lava stream which seared as it flowed aught of humanity that yet remained in his heart, and filled it to the brim with vengeance.

He went up to Flash Carry, and with the look of a demon he hissed out in his broken English. "False woman, bad woman Hamet can love, he have too, hate more much! Ha, one false traitress, many more time false. But this time de most bad! Ha, fear, tremble. Hamet's knife long, he no stab Carry, he will eat the heart of her lover, he vows his skull to the black goddess Cali, the blood drinker!"

"What's that ere you are now muttering, you black devil," said Ben Banning, who caught the last word. "You threaten Master Tom Starling, you swear, in the name of your devil of an Ingian goddess, I swear as an honest Englishman, that your black throat and Jack Ketch's rope shall make short acquaintance, if you don't lower topsails, and steer out of our mate's course."

The Lascar turned again towards the sailors, nervously twitching his hands, and glaring round as if in search of some weapon.

Ben Banning laughed.

"It ain't no use, Ingeerman! he said, "your skewers are clean took away from you, you hasn't even the bit of rope what your black pirates slips so sly over innocent necks. No it won't do, these ere birds claws of yours won't close round the neck of Ben Banning!" These last words of the sailor were provoked by the action of Hamet, who, with his dark slender fingers, extended like the claws of a vulture, made a grasp at Banning's throat.

To throw the insane wretch off was as easy a task as it had been for Starling to deprive him of his weapons, he staggered and measured his length on the floor, and his head coming in contact with the corner of one of the heavy benches as he fell, he received a somewhat severe blow above the temple. Luckily for him the blood spurted out from the wound which might otherwise have stunned him. He gathered himself up again with the agility of a cat, or rather, perhaps, a panther, since it was that animal that he most resembled, when he glared round at the Englishman, with his flaming eyes, his glistening white teeth exposed, and his lithe form half crawling, like that of a wild beast, prepared to spring. Then as the blood trickled down his face, he put his hand to the wound, and holding it up looked at the crimson stream as it dripped from his fingers.

Then he shook his clenched meagre fist at Ben.

"Beware! beware!" he said, in that low hissing tone, which was the most dire indication of his rage.

"Beware, you man, you big Englishman, and your Sahib yonder, Hamet will see the color of your blood too, he swears it, he swears it."

With these words, and without looking towards Flash Carry, who seemed little to heed his violence, and who after thanking Tom, was endeavouring to soothe her terrified companion poor Crazy Jane, the Malay stole out of the house, not even asking for his splendid weapons which had been given into the charge of Matthew Stedman.

Old Stedman shook his head,

"That feller Hamet is a vicious reptile," he said, "for all the world like one of the nasty sarpents in the Ingees where he comes from."

The former lover of Flash Carry, William Conway or Blustering Bill, had sat sullenly watching this scene, not even offering to interfere when the Malay threatened the life of the young woman. But now he laughed grimly, and said,

"Aye, aye, Mat, that ere is very true, but you should remember old chap as the sarpent's skin is all over shining colors, Carry is one who was always took by finery. She was caught like a mackerel with a bit of red rag years and years agone."

In this speech Blustering Bill alluded to the first defection of Flash Carry, who had left her native village in the company of a recruiting sergeant.

Had any other person ventured such an allusion, Flash Carry would incontinently have favoured the speaker with a torrent of that eloquence in which the fair fish-dealers of Billingsgate are supposed to excel. This oratorical art, however, flourishes in the district of Wapping, and Flash Carry had taken a high degree as an eminent mistress of it.

It was therefore to the infinite surprise of Stedman, that, turning from her companions as she caught the last words of Blustering Bill, she approached that worthy, and said with a coaxing air,

"Don't go to be a ripping up of old grievances Bill, else I shall talk about Polly Bluebell up at the Willow farm."

"You were clean wrong about that business, Carry," answered the man, "Polly Bluebell was nought to me, I was a sort of go between atwixt her and the farmer's son what married her a month arter you runned away with the sergeant. Howsomever," he concluded in a rougher accent, "I have got summat else on hand to-night than to talk over this ere old gal and boy gammon; and here's the flash cove as I'm waiting for. Oh rot them sailors, I wish they'd make themselves scarce."

This last observation was applied to Tom Starling and his companions, to whom he had whispered the character of the house, and begged of them rather to put up with having been cheated in their game at cards there, than have an encounter with thieves and burglars.

This wise counsel by no means suited Bob Green, who was the chief victim, and who, to the whisper of Tom, answered—"Bide a bit, mate: I'm watching the black pirates—I sees their little game. I'll have 'em yard-arm and yard-arm in a trice, if you will but stow your jawing tackle."

At this moment, however, Crazy Jane uttered a loud scream, and, breaking away from Flash Carry, took her child by the hand, and, rushing across the room, threw herself on her knees before Tom Starling, imploring his protection.

The cause of her alarm was the entrance of the very person for whom Blustering Bill had been waiting—a middle-aged well-dressed man, who, though an intelligent observer might have noticed a somewhat sinister expression of countenance, had certainly nothing in his general demeanour to justify the terror which the poor creature evinced.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FRAY WITH THE BURGLARS AT THE "JOLLY TAR"—FLASH CARRY, AND THE ESCAPE—THE DUNGEON.

THE new comer, who, it appeared, visited the "Jolly Tar" on an appointment with Blustering Bill, laughed heartily at the terror of Crazy Jane, whom he protested he had never before seen in his life.

"You lie, Harry Wattson—you lie!" exclaimed Crazy Jane. "They say my wits are gone; I think sometimes they are: but I know you—I know you! Do you remember the dark house in the glen, when the clouds shot

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forth angry lightnings, and the wind raved, and the rain beat, as it does to-night—as it does to-night?"

"Poor creature!" said the stranger, approaching Crazy Jane, and speaking in a tone of pity, either real or affected. "She mistakes me, it seems, for some one who has injured her. I never saw her in my life before; and my name, sir, is Atkins."

He addressed the last words to Tom Starling; but such reply as the latter might have made was prevented by a a loud outcry from the fellow with whom Bob Green had been playing at cards.

Taking advantage of Bob's attention having been drawn from the game by the shriek of Crazy Jane, this worthy, who rejoiced in the cognomen of the Spider, bestowed on him both for his cunning and his cruelty, flattered himself that he should be able, under cover of this new turmoil, to cheat the simple mariner again, as he had not failed to do when the poor fellow threw down his cards on the entrance of the Malay Hamet.

Fortune however was less favourable to him on the second occasion, and Bob caught him in the very act of abstracting the king and queen of diamonds from the cards which had been dealt to him.

"Hallo, you land-shark, you dirty pirate of a cock-boat, take that, dowse your glim, and learn better manners."

As Bob spoke he threw all his strength into the straight forward blow which he administered just between the eyes of the rogue he had caught cheating him. The fellow instantly measured his length on the floor, overturning the table in his fall, so that the bottles, wat r jugs, drinking cans, and tin candlesticks with their flaring tallow candles, all came down with one tremendous crash, the candles being extinguished in their fall. The blaze of the fire, and the dingy light of the one oil-fed iron lamp that depended from the ceiling feebly illumined the scene that ensued.

The Spider, with blood streaming from his nostrils and his eyes sealed by the blow he had received jumped to his feet swearing horribly, and striking blindly at his antagonist, who laughed as he watched the impotent attack. The new-comer, Atkins, whom Crazy Jane had addressed by the name of Wattson, endeavoured to restrain Blustering Bill, who rushed onwards to join in the fray.

"Fool, fool," he said, "there's better game for you to-night than mingling in a brawl like this; well, have your own way then and pay for it," he added as Blustering Bill dashed forwards, exclaiming with an oath,

"Pluck up Spider, here's your pals at your elbow three to one again the sailors."

"You be blowed," shouted Ben Banning, opposing a pair of fists worthy of Hercules to the attack of Blustering Bill. "Six to one o' such land lubbers as you, aint the vally of one lad of the Jupiter, though they beant man o' war's men.

Fast and furious grew the uproar, for the Lascar sailors who had been loitering in the tap room during the evening took part with the thieves who had got up the skirmish.

In the dim light that prevailed, Tom Starling, who had perforce taken part with his men, became aware that the forces of the enemy had received a reinforcement, as a door at the back of the apartment burst open, and some half-dozen dark figures poured through it into the apartment.

It was in vain that old Matthew Stedman roared for order, and exclaimed that his house would be ruined. The dull thud of heavy blows, mingled with the crash of falling furniture, the shricks of the woman, and oaths of the men.

In the demoniacal confusion of the scene, Tom Starling was fully aware that the robbery, and perhaps murder of himself and his companions was the main object of the wretches by whom they were surrounded, for while warding off the attack of a fellow, whose truculent visage was visible in the fire light, as disfigured by a black patch over one eye, he felt some unknown hand tug violently at his watch chain, which in the fashion of the day, was exposed with a bundle of seals at its extremity.

Luckily for Tom the chain snapped in the jerk, and the fellow who had caught at it rolled on the ground, at the same moment that the powerful arm of the young sailor stretched his opponent senseless on the floor.

Just at that moment, too, a quantity of water was dashed into the grate, there was a loud hiss, and sputter with the rival elements, a cloud of scorching dust puffed out into the room, and a terrible smell from the extinguished fire: then all was chimerian darkness, for by some means, the oil lamp was also extinguished.

A warm, soft hand, the hand of a woman grasped that of Tom Starling, and the voice of Flash Carry whispered. "This way, this way, or you and your friends will be murdered!"

As the girl spoke she dragged the young man towards what had appeared a closet, beside the fireplace.

At the pressure of Flash Carry's hand the back of this closet receded, and she dragged Starling down a dark passage, so narrow, that she was obliged to precede him.

"But my friends, the three sailors!" expostulated Starling, trying to extricate his hand from that of the young man.

"They are safe: old Stedman will look to them," answered Carry. "They will meet you in Ratcliff-highway; but the two devils, Blustering Bill and Hamet, are both set against you. They will watch. Do not come near this place again, young man, as you value your life."

As Flash Carry spoke, she reached the end of the dark passage, and, pushing open a door, partly led, partly thrust Starling into what, by the damp earthy smell, he concluded to be a vault, or cellar, below the level of the house.

The place was profoundly dark.

"There," said Flash Carry, in a low voice, that sounded strangely hollow in that subterranean place—"you will be safe here, if you are silent; but, for your life's sake, make no sound. I will return, and get you quit of this place presently: it is a den of thieves and murderers."

As Flash Carry ceased speaking, she relinquished her hold of Starling's hand, and, ere he was aware, quitted the place, closing the door behind her.

Tom Starling was as brave a fellow as ever fought the battles of England, by sea or land; yet a strange unwonted sickness fastened on his heart as he listened to Flash Carry's retreating steps, reverberated in that underground passage.

He was not willing to think ill of the girl, or to imagine that, in return for having saved her life, she would treacherously practise against his. But why had she hurried him to this dark and secret place? Was he not as well able as his brave shipmates to cope with the miscreants among whom he had fallen? If the girl really meant him well, why had she imprisoned him in this dark dank dungeon?

The story about his companions, too, seemed improbable. Why should he not have been suffered to leave the "Jolly Tar" by the public outlet as well as they?

Amid the dense darkness that prevailed, Starling sought, through the senses of hearing and touch, a knowledge of his whereabouts.

The place appeared spacious; but when first Tom laid his hand upon the wall, he drew it back with a shudder, as it encountered the cold and slimy substance of some noisome reptile that crept athwart it. Overcoming that sense of abhorrence, he pursued his search, and, on either side of the dungeon, perceived that there was an aperture, breast-high, in the wall, and defended by thick iron bars.

The aperture on the right seemed to communicate only with another dungeon; that on the left, Starling conjectured, was not far distant from some outlet, as the air came fresher through the bars there than on the opposite side.

Attentively listening, too, the experienced ears of the young sailor detected a distant sound, which he knew to

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be the gentle dashing of water, either on its bed, or against the shore, or wall of some building.

Hope revived in the breast of Tom Starling at this sound.

He conjectured, from the position of the house, that it was near, and, perhaps, had been partly built over, one of the numerous ditches scattered about the locality, which were, in parts, little else than mere creeks, or inlets of the river, as they were filled with water at high tides, and sometimes even inundated the homes of the poor inhabitants of the spot.

Tom felt across the aperture with his hands, and found there would be heighth and breadth for him to pass through, if he could but remove the bars.

This he at first flattered himself would be no very difficult task, as, by the touch, he felt that they were eaten deep with rust, and shook in their stanchions beneath his vigorous grasp. They would not entirely yield, however. He tried them all, and could not remove one.

His hands were bruised and bleeding with his vain efforts to free himself. He had directed his efforts chiefly against the grating through the bars of which he felt the freshest air, and where his ear still detected the sound of dashing water.

The few minutes which Flash Carry had mentioned as the period of her absence had passed into the lapse of an hour, and still she did not return.

That one hour to Tom Starling seemed to move as though its leaden wings were burdened with a stone.

The unfortunate young sailor could not now doubt, that it was with a fiendish treachery and ingratitude, that the woman whose life he had saved, had brought him there to be dealt with by the red hand of murder. Tom Starling had no fear of death, he had braved it many a wild night on the storm tossed ocean, he would have encountered it fearlessly fighting for his country, as a gallant man-of-war's man, but to perish like a fox in a hole, to be starved perhaps, like a wolf in his cave, the victim of an outcast woman, the lowest and most abandoned of her sex, associated with the vilest of his own, oh! this was too terrible.

More than the bitterness of death was in the bitterness of that thought. Again, and again, the unfortunate youth made a furious attack upon the bars of both apertures but without effect, till with a hollow lumbering noise, a huge brick that he had loosened in what may be called the inner grating of the vault fell to the ground.

The young man was himself startled by the tremendous uproar that followed the fall of the brick, and he remembered with no agreeable sensations, how urgently Flash Carry had implored him to be silent, while imprisoned in that dreary vault.

Involuntarily, he drew back and listened with suspended breath, in the fear that the noise would rouse some murderous foe.

No sound followed when the echo of the falling brick had died away, but the darkness in that compartment of the subterranean place, contiguous to the aperture from which he knocked the brick became less dense. A kind of white hue appeared to steal upon the blank of darkness, as though it were filled with a white fog. Presently a faint light as if a star gleamed at a distance, through this fog. Nearer and nearer it approached, and even a hollow sound of footsteps was heard.

Was it friend or foe approaching, scarce the latter thought Tom Starling, for Flash Carry who had hurried him to that retreat in the darkness, who had so enjoined silence, would surely come to liberate her captive with a light and give notice if her intents were good.

Another minute of that intense excitement which even a brave man may feel when expecting the cowardly attack of the assassin, and the coming light flashed freely on the walls of the dungeon contiguous to that in which the young sailor was imprisoned. A low-roofed damp cell it was, like that which he occupied, a doorway without a door was opposite to the grating, and appeared to open on the same long dark passage along which Flash Carry had led Starling.

As the person carrying the light entered the dungeon, it was with feelings little pleasurable that Tom Starling recognised the vindictive Hamet.

The Malay hurried towards the grating through which he could gaze into the neighbouring dungeon, and an expression of triumph absolutely fiendish lighted up his dusky face, as peering through the bars, he recognised the man against whom he had evinced such an insane hatred.

"Ah ah, Sahib," he exclaimed with a chuckle. "how you do, got nice bed dere? dat Carry am fool; she hide you here tink keep you safe: no tink Hamet sabbee dis hole; Hamet big friend ob ole Mat; Carry fool. Carry no sabbee no tink ob dat. Ah, it am bery good; de ole Yengeese man, ole Mat, he no like uproar, he no like smell of blood in him house. Bery quiet down here: no man sabbee you here, no man see the place, only rats dat, ugh, shall eat you all up. Ole Mat not know you here, he nebber come down; he no like de place; so you stay here and starve one, two, three days, den you very ill, you sink, you sleep, and Hamet come and put rope round your neck, as servants of Cali do far away over de sea in his own country, you too weak to fight you no hold Hamet's hand again big Yengeese."

"Wretch!" exclaimed Tom, approaching the grating on the other side of which his fierce foe grinned and mocked at him, in perfect security. "I will wring the life from you, scorpion, that you are."

In the almost supernatural strength of desperation, Tom again seized one of the bars of the grating and shook it so violently that more of the brickwork gave way, and the rusty iron bar loosed and fell out in his hand, furnishing him with a formidable weapon.

In consequence of his inferior station, the head of the Malay was only just above the grating, which was level with the breast of the tall and finely formed Englishman.

The wretch, a coward with all his fury, drew away from the grating the moment that Tom dashed at it, and stood at a few paces distance, moving and gibbering like an exultant lemoniac in his mockery, of what he thought his victims fruitless efforts to unloose the bar, he even ventured back a step or two, holding up the candle, and grimly saying that he would afford the sailor light on his work.

"You no think Carry come save you!" he said. "Hamet will drink her blood! Hamet have all revenge, he conquer you, he cry out for fear now, he laugh at you!"

The secret of fiendly laughter in which Hamet indulged as he uttered these last words, was suddenly changed to a howl of rage and pain, for at that moment Starling became possessed of the bar, with which he aimed a blow at his exulting enemy. Had Hamet stood a foot nearer to the grating, his life and his crimes would have been instantaneously terminated, as it was, the extreme force of the bar, jagged with rust, and the force with which it had been wrenched from the wall grazed his temple, and descended with such force upon his left shoulder, that he dropped the candle, which was extinguished in the fall. With a volly of oaths the wretch fled from the place, not forgetting to assure Tom Starling that his ultimate escape was impossible, and that he, Hamet, was going in search of some of his countrymen, who would help him drink the Englishman's heart's blood!"

Ere the last sound of Hamet's retreating footsteps had died away, Tom Starling held close counsel with himself as to what his course should be.

The aperture made in the grating was not sufficiently wide to admit the passage of his body; while it was certain that to follow the Malay was to rush on destruction. The door which the woman Carry had shut behind her, had previously resisted all his endeavours to force it open; besides, that door also opened on the avenues to the public-house, which it was so necessary that he should avoid.

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Oh! how earnestly, in the hour of that more than midnight darkness which had again fallen around him, did the poor youth long for the ray of that feeble taper which had fallen from the hand of Hamet.

That the murderous Indian would soon return, reinforced by some of his countrymen, who were the slaves of his will, Starling did not doubt. He knew too well that those demi-savages were reckless of the laws of civilised states, even when risking their utmost penalty; and he knew, also, that Hamet considered himself secure from the law.

The vigilant police of these days did not exist fifty years ago; and many a murder was committed in the haunts of crime, the mystery of which was not developed—the penalty for which was not paid—nor will be till the last great accounting day, when all hearts must render up their secrets to the one unerring Judge.

The disappearance of a sailor—the mate of a merchantman—Tom Starling knew would be but a theme for brief comment, with the limited newspaper press of the day, when the "Times" consisted of one small sheet, half the size of the "Illustrated Police News" of the present day, that vigilant supervisor, whose exposure of his crimes, such a man as Hamet the Malay could not have escaped.

With that energy and rapidity known only to an active and firm mind in cases of extreme emergency, Tom Starling reviewed his own position.

His story he felt would be a common one, and would excite but little commiseration from the staid and proper members of society.

It stood thus: a young sailor, only a merchantman, entered a low public house in Wapping, nothing extraordinary or of unusual interest in that. He interfered to save a woman of bad character from a murderous assault of her paramour. Alas, for the time and place, there was nothing unusual in that either.

Poor Tom Starling sighed over this prospect, it would be assumed either that he had fallen a victim to the associates selected by his own licentiousness, or that he had perhaps been pressed. The royal navy was in want of such smart, tight, well-seasoned sailors as he was, and not very nice as to the method of obtaining them.

Tom Starling sighed again but with that second aspiration he drew strength and nerve for exertion, his fine, frank, honorable spirit, recoiled from the thought of being classed with those low *debauchees* whose reckless profligacies wore the stain of the noblest of professions.

He must he would escape, but how?

Involuntarily Tom's grasp tightened on the iron bar; ill would it fare with the banditti of the "Jolly Tar" if they opposed him while he retained command of that weapon.

Escape, either by the door, or the aperture from which he had taken the bar was alike impossible, nor was it even desirable, as it would have brought him in contact with Hamet and his associates.

The grated window on the other side of the dungeon, that no doubt communicated with some outlet from that ill-fated inn. There was Starling's only hope of escape.

Again with vigorous hands, with a strength of desperation the young man shook the bars on the opposite side of the dungeon.

But they were too firmly fixed, less corroded, perhaps, by the hand of time, they did not yield a jot.

Starling endeavoured to use the bar he held in his hand as a lever, it was mouldering with age, and it snapped in half.

He staggered back, spent with physical exertion and mental infirmity, he fancied that in the distance, he already heard the returning footsteps of Hamet, with a host of companion murderers at his heels.

Tom Starling had no very close ties of relationship, only an old uncle and aunt, who had been parents to his orphan childhood, yet he did not fancy he could have loved his real parents more.

As to what is called love, Tom, save such amenities as young and handsome men indulge in, or are dragged into, was wholly heart free.

He had not yet met the woman to whom he would unrestrainedly yield that heart of his, which in its own excellence, demanded the like high qualities from its mate.

It was terrible, dreadful, to be snatched from life in such a mode as this.

Suddenly, as exhausted with exertion, Starling leaned panting heavily against the dungeon wall, expecting momentarily the rush of Hamet and his murderers, he heard a key grate in a lock close to his ear, and a soft voice exclaim, "Sir, sir, come—come, or you will be too late!"

With the gentle voice too a pale light streamed through the bars of that grating which he had unavailingly attempted to break open, and, as with renewed hope, Tom Starling approached it, he beheld a sweet childish face gleaming like moonlight between the bars. The face of Crazy Jane's child, little Snowdrop.

CHAPTER IX.

FLORENCE AND SIR MILES—VILLANY THROWING OFF HIS MASK—OPPORTUNE ARRIVAL OF HERBERT MANDEVILLE—THE CHALLENGE.

FAIN would poor Florence have excused herself from that interview with Sir Miles Cressingham which her sister Ellinor had promised to him.

"Dear child," said Ellinor, "do not suppose that I willingly urge you to face this bad man; but do not, I implore you, give him the triumph of thinking that you fear him so much. Retort upon his base proposals, dearest, with the scorn they merit. Such a man as he, if he find you fear him, will think his purpose half achieved. I entirely agree with you in your estimate of the expressions used by dear papa in his letter; I hold this man, Sir Miles Cressingham, virtually to have our father's blood upon his soul; and none of your sisters, darling—not even Alice, in her infatuation, or Maud, Clara, or Adeline, in their weakness—would, I am sure, wish you to sacrifice yourself at the altar for their sakes, or so peaceably to become the recipients of your husband's bounty."

"Since you think it necessary, Ellinor," answered Florence, "I will see Sir Miles; but, oh! dearest, do not leave me alone with him."

"Nay, dearest," returned Ellinor, scarce able to forbear a smile, amid all her sorrow. "With all his audacity and villany, Sir Miles will not attempt to carry you off, in the style of some cruel baron or false knight of old, in these days. Florence, such men as Sir Miles shelter their iniquities under the wing of the law. Be assured Sir Miles will not commit himself to any act which the law would punish. It is with the very law itself he hopes to destroy us; it is with the scorpion whip of poverty, which, alas! our sisters are so little able to endure, that he thinks he will affright you into consent with any vile proposal that he dares to make. But you will not yield to him, Florence—you will not?" concluded Ellinor, looking wistfully into the eyes of her sister, as she asked the question.

Ellinor knew that her favorite younger sister was exquisitely pure and sensitive, that she had in her the germ of all that is excellent in woman; but she feared for her heroism, her firmness. Florence was so childlike, so gentle in her manner, that the strong, brave-souled Ellinor even, did not understand how fully the young girl shared in all the attributes of her own superior nature.

"Yield, Ellinor!" exclaimed Florence. "Become the wife of Sir Miles Cressingham! oh, you little know me that you can even allude to such a possibility. I am not so unworthy to be your sister, dear, noble Nell. Believe me, it is not in cowardice, but in horror that I shrink from seeing Sir Miles; but since it must be, let us have the interview over as soon as may be."

"Sir Miles is here waiting in the little breakfast-parlour," said Ellinor, opening, as she spoke, the door of the room mentioned.

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THE DUEL IN THE THUNDERSTORM.

The Baronet rose eagerly from the chair on which he was lounging at the sound of the opening door, but a frown gathered on his brow, and a sneer on his lip when he saw that the young girl was accompanied.

Both the frown and the sneer were observed by Ellinor.

"Be not discomposed, Sir Miles Cressingham," she said, with bitter irony in her tones, "I am not going to play the part of a duenna and intrude upon your interview with my sister, I have too much confidence in her high nature, and too much contempt for your base and low one."

The dark blood deserted the face of Sir Miles, he gnawed his lip in white passion, the contempt of Ellinor was worse to bear than the hatred of Florence.

"Miss Ellinor Amery," he said, "you may live to repent those words and find me rather an object of terror than contempt. This is not the first time you have insulted me. Ellinor Amery you might as well defy a tiger fresh from the jungle."

"When I learn to fear you, Sir Miles Cressingham!" returned Ellinor, in the same ironical and icy accent, which the Baronet had found so exasperating. "When I learn to fear, I will humbly entreat your pardon for having despised you. The animal to which you have chosen to compare yourself, is, we all know, a very cunning as well as cruel brute, but God has given man his brain and his hand to govern and subdue all the monsters of the forest. When we encounter human tigers we oppose their physical force with courage, and their craft with wisdom. I leave my sister alone with you without any fear of your eating her up, Sir Tiger, I beg pardon, I mean Sir Miles Cressingham!"

The weather had set in very warm for the season, yet early in April, and the glass doors of the little breakfast room stood open, and Ellinor passed through them out into the garden. She looked back as she crossed the lawn, and perceived Sir Miles Cressingham still standing at the window as if he were looking after her.

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"The villain!" said Ellinor, with a renewed curl of her beautiful lip," he is looking to see if I am out of sight, he does flatter himself then that I fear him either for Florence or myself. No, no, Sir Miles Cressingham, for Florence perhaps, in some lone place I might perhaps, for there is, I believe, no atrocity of which you are not capable; but in open day in what is still our own house, it is the vanity of iniquity to fancy you can inspire terror."

So, with the bitter smile still upon that lip the dewy coral of which promised nectar, and a proud bearing of that neck that rivalled in its soft white beauty the plumage of the swan, Ellinor passed into one of the pleached alleys of the garden thick overgrown with acacia and laburnam, and where her light and graceful figure was concealed from the occupants of the little breakfast room.

At the end of the alley where Ellinor was walking, a small gate opened from the flower garden into the park. This gate was unlocked, and was often used by members of the family as it was a near mode of access to the house.

Ellinor was not pleased the second time she approached the gate in her walk up and down the gravelled path, to encounter Herbert Mandeville.

The sagacious Ellinor had a suspicion that the point of honour or pride in him would have acted differently to her own, and that it was possible Herbert would resent or forbid the interview of Florence with Sir Miles Cressingham.

Besides, those were duelling days, above all among naval and military men, and Ellinor was quite aware that a little of the insolence with which Sir Miles had overwhelmed her, would, if addressed to Herbert Mandeville, result in a challenge.

Ellinor did not want Herbert to be dragged into a duel with Sir Miles, there was quite risk enough to his life in his profession, in fighting the battles of his country. Ellinor knew how perfectly he and Florence loved each other. Sometimes, for we are none of us perfect—Ellinor was not. Sometimes, therefore, she had felt a little envy of Florence; not that she was in love with Herbert, but she wished that she had herself had such a love: so noble in heart and soul, so true and kind.

No, Ellinor thought too highly of Herbert Mandeville, far too much of her sister's happiness, not to be most anxious to prevent an interview between him and Sir Miles.

So she staid him at the gate, and kept him walking up and down the pleached alley, spoke of the illness of Alice, of the doubtful position of herself and sisters respecting money matters, of anything and everything save the presence of Sir Miles Cressingham at the Cedars at that moment.

Alas, as Burns say—

"The best laid plans of mice and men, gang aft agly."

So in this instance did the plan of the witty and resolute Ellinor.

The second time that she and Herbert approached the lawn in their promenade up and down the garden walk, a wild sobbing cry met their ears, a shriek almost it was, wafted athwart the lawn on the still morning air.

It was the voice of Florence, and though her now terrified sister crossed the lawn with the swift foot of the hunted hare, the young lover was more speedy than she, and when Ellinor, panting and breathless, dashed again into the breakfast room, she found Florence clinging round the neck of Herbert weeping bitterly, and Sir Miles rising with a dark and threatening look from among the overturned tables and chairs which he had apparently knocked down in his fall.

"Sir Miles Cressingham you are a villain!" exclaimed Herbert.

"Oh, yes indeed, indeed he is!" exclaimed Florence turning from her lover to throw her arms round the neck of Ellinor.

"Oh Ellinor," sobbed the poor girl, "you do not know, you cannot imagine what this man has said, how he has dared insult me, I cannot, cannot, tell you."

"Pray Miss Florence Amery do no such violence to your delicacy," said Sir Miles turning upon the sisters a look which the great master-fiend might have envied, so horribly expressive was it of licentiousness, treachery, and hate. "I will save your sister from the trouble, Miss Ellinor, I will myself repeat what I said, begging you and Lieutenant Mandeville most distinctly to observe that I spoke merely to my purpose, to my intent, from the execution of which heaven and hell united shall not foil me. I tell her then, and I tell you, and her boy lover yonder, who has dared degrade me with a blow, that on her I will be revenged for all these insults. The name of Amery shall become synonymous with infamy, you will find madam, you will find, how the world will treat such fair ladies as yourself and your sisters now that your father's wealth is scattered to the winds.

"Your magnificent sister Alice is already prepared by her strong passions and luxurious habits for that career—as surely as your other three sisters by the weakness of their minds, which will render them the prey of any roué captivated by their beauty. You, Ellinor, and that trembling girl, Florence, who scornfully rejected my honourable offers — you alone are truly noble, high-minded, and virtuous women; but you will find—you shall both find—of how much worth to their possessors are honour, chastity, and truth in women, when beauty is allied to poverty. Oh! I have no doubt but both you think when I turn you, as I swear by all the fiends I will, from the splendid mansions, in town and country, which were once your father's, you will *earn* an honest maintenance—that you will work—you will work. Idle dreams, ladies! You are too beautiful—too witty. Your own dear sex will not let you work, and, in their envy and malice, will turn you over to the licentious passions of the men, and comfort themselves in their hatred by telling each other that they despise you. Yes, Miss Ellinor Amery, I can cast your nativity without consulting the stars. You will be the mistress of some nobleman or gentleman yet unknown; and Lieutenant Mandeville's fair fiancée there shall be my MISTRESS, madam—MINE!"

More than once during this atrocious speech Herbert Mandeville was about to interrupt Sir Miles; but he was withheld by Ellinor; when, however, the daring climax came, he hurled aside the heavy table behind which Sir Miles had ensconced himself, and seized the baronet by the collar.

"Nay, young gentleman—I am prepared this time!" said Sir Miles, with an insulting laugh, while he wrestled fiercely with Herbert. Ellinor, on her part, extricated herself from the clinging arms of her sister with so much impetuosity, that Florence staggered, and fell back upon one of the couches; while Ellinor rang the bell furiously; and two of the male servants, who must have been in suspiciously close attendance, rushed into the room.

"Herbert, Herbert," shrieked Ellinor, "you degraded yourself by laying a finger on that villain. Release him I entreat I command you!"

"Hudson," she continued, turning to the butler who had been in her father's service before she was born—"Hudson, call two of the grooms, let them bring horse-whips and scourge Sir Miles Cressingham from the house."

The Baronet had released himself from the grasp of Herbert, and first drawing himself up to his full height, he looked defiantly round, then bowing ironically, he said,—

"Miss Ellinor Amery, I beg to inform you that these servants are virtually mine. They had best beware how they obey the order you have been so bold to give. As to Lieutenant Mandeville if he wears a sword I know how to use one, and at the sword's point I will settle the quarrel with him. In conclusion, ladies, I wish you good morning, and in withdrawing from your charming

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society, beg most earnestly to assure you that no long time shall elapse, ere you receive proofs of the deep gratitude I entertain for the courtesies I have received from you.

Sir Miles again bowed in derision, looked scornfully at the flushed cheek and blazing eyes of the beautiful Ellinor, and was about to quit the room when Herbert said,—

"A moment, if you please, Sir Miles Cressingham, my regiment is, as you are aware, under immediate orders for Spain, our meeting must be prompt."

"To-morrow, if you please, Lieutenant Mandeville," said Sir Miles with a sneer." I will have the honour to send a friend to communicate with any person you may name this evening.

"The Captain of my company is now at St. Oswin's," said Herber, "and I have no doubt will be my friend on this occasion."

"To St. Oswin's then I will send," answered Sir Miles, passing out at the door which the old butler held open with a trembling hand.

He feared for the future of his young mistresses, among whom Ellinor and Florence were his favourites.

Florence began to weep, for she feared Sir Miles Cressingham's known skill as a swordsman.

CHAPTER X.

LITTLE SNOWDROP—THE STONE STAIRS—THE SUBTERRANEAN WAY—THE DARK WATERS.

SIR, sir, here is a key here which Flash Carry gave me, and she said you had best take it through the bars as the lock of the grating was rusty and would be too stiff for me to turn."

These words floating through the murk dungeon in the silvery accents of little Snowdrop were welcome to Tom Starling.

His very bravery made the kind of death with which he had been threatened by the murderous Malay essentially horrible.

"Bless your eyes litt'e one!" said the sailor as putting his hand through the grating he received from Snowdrop a huge rust-encrusted key.

"Bless your eyes litte one, what a figure head you have got to be sure, just as though one of the angels the Bible tells us of were a peeping down from the skies."

"I don't know about that," answered Snowdrop innocently, "but pray make haste, for your friends have been beaten and ill-used and Flash Carry sent me here to let you out while she and Mr. Stedman got them safe off; for Hamet has got a lot of Lascars, and nobody but soldiers can quiet them.

Mr. Stedman is quite frightened and the Spider is along with them!"

"Nobody but soldiers quiet them, the skulking cut-throat blackfaced cowardly knaves," ejaculated Tom, as turning the rusty key with his strong hand, he threw open the door in which he now found the grating was fixed, and discovered a steep and narrow flight of stone stairs at the head of which Snowdrop was standing. "Nobody but soldiers still them. You don't know any better little one, soldiers indeed, give me a clear deck and half a dozen of my mates, and I'd settle three score of the black devils in a jiffy."

"Come sir, come!" cried Snowdrop intreatingly, and looking indeed like an angel visitor in that gloomy horrible place, "come sir, come, there's a passage from here down to the water side, and if we are quick we shall get away before Hamet comes back, for he knows all about this place."

"Does he," muttered Tom to himself, "I am not over and above fond of showing my jib among the beaks or any other nest o' shore-going, long-togged, lawyer coves, but dowse my eyes if I don't set the first watch to overhaul this piratical den, and have that goat-faced skipper they call Stedman, laid up in limbo."

"Come, sir, come," again pleaded little Snowdrop holding up the feeble little lantern in her hand to guide the sailor down the dark and precipitous descent.

A sailor accustomed, like Tom, to wintry fogs in the Channel when outward bound, to climb the dizzy mast and hold on to ropes slippery with frost, or mid the seething foam and wild winds of the still more terrible hurricane of the West Indies. could look down from the summit of the steep and slippery stairs into the unfathomable gulf of pitchy blackness below without either the dizziness of brain or uncertainty of foot which a less experienced climber might have felt.

The staircase was so narrow that but one person could pass down it at a time, the steps worn with age were green and slimy with damp, a loathsome moisture streamed on the walls. which, though rugged. offered no abutments at which the hand could grasp if the foot slipped in the treacherous descent.

On quitting the dungeon Tom Starling took the precaution to relock the door and put the key in his pocket, thereby delaying the immediate pursuit of Hamet should he execute his threat of returning with his countrymen.

Down, down, still descended the sailor and his fair young guide, Tom had already counted fifty steps and still the gulf into which he was descending was wrapped in impenetrable darkness.

The dungeon to which he had been conducted by Flash Carry was below the level of Stedman's house but this secret staircase seemed to lead down into the very bowels of the earth itself.

"Shiver my timbers!" at last ejaculated Tom, "if this is'nt being cast on a lee shore in a dark night with a vengeance."

Then pity filled the heart of the gallant sailor as he looked on the fair fragile creature who was his guide, placing her little feet so deftly on those rude slippery stairs, and holding up her lantern to throw out the light for him. when it fell on her own pure pale face, shining out like a star in the darkness.

Down, down, still!—at last the pair have reached the bottom of the steep descent.

Hark! what was that?

That hoarse cry of rage and hate—muffled in the distance—most resembling the growl of some hungry tiger in the deep jungle.

"Hark!" exclaimed Snowdrop. "Oh! quick, sir—quick. Hamet and his men are seeking for you."

This child, when excited, expressed herself with an ease and confidence beyond her years, and a purity of speech that must have been partly instinctive, and partly derived from her mother, whose language, amid all her mental aberration, was that of the educated classes, rather than of the depraved and miserable outcasts among whom she had been thrown.

"Never fear, little one," answered Tom, tightening his grasp on the broken iron bar, of which he had wisely kept possession, as a defensive weapon. "Thanks to you, my little heart of oak. Tom Starling is not pent up like a wild beast in a cage. It won't be good for any of those black scoundrels to bring their skulls in contact with this bar."

"No; but, sir," persisted Snowdrop, "we must be quick—indeed we must. When Hamet finds you are gone, he will come down. There is another way into this place. We are near the river, sir; and there's—ugh!"—and the child shuddered, and Tom felt the little hand which she had placed in his grow cold—"there is a dreadful black stream that runs from this place out into the river; and, if they open the sluice-gates, you will be up to your neck in water in a minute, and we shall both be drowned."

Poor Tom did not feel much exhilirated at this intelligence. He remembered then the dashing of water which he had heard in the upper apartment—which, in the excitement of his escape, he had ceased to notice. Now, as he listened again, with an eager ear, he caught the dull swash, swash, of some turbid stream.

This vicinity of water accounted for the damp of the staircase, and that of the cavern subterranean along which little Snowdrop hurried the Sailor with hasty steps.

"There there," yonder cried the child with a gasping

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voice and indicating with her little white hand a pair of iron gates or doors to the right—a rude but very efficient, imitation or substitute for the flood gates of a lock.

"The e sir the wat r is up there, and oh there is one of the big rats that live in it, they would eat you up those rats would!"

As the child spoke she clung in terror to Tom Starling while a huge hideous water rat leaped across their fe t.

"There are steps a little way on sir" said the child, "and we shall go up them, and get out into an alley that leads us right down to the river, and Flash Carry wi l have a boat there, that Dick Daring rows, a good fellow he is; and he will take us over to Rotherhithe."

"Poor child," ejaculated Tom "its bad sailing for you with such a ship's company as that swab dame Fo tune has cast you among. Brave little lass too, how did such a cherub venture into this darksome hole!"

"Oh I have been here many times!" answered Snowdrop. "Red Reuben poor fellow was obliged to hide down here for more than a week, for fear of his father the Spider, and I used to bring him food. But hark there's Hamet's voice. oh, I can hear him swear, oh come sir come or we shall both be drowned!"

Now drowning in open waters with heaven's sky above him was not a fate of which Tom Starling entertained any apprehensions.

It had been a feat,r of his to swim round his ship in fair weather, in utter, and it must be admitted in rash and inconsiderate defiance of the sharks, but there is always a little dash of foolhardiness in a sailors courage.

This recklessness, however, by no means, held such control over Tom Star ing, that he could reg rd with any equanimity the struggle amid such turbid and filthy waters as he knew would rush through th se sluice gates into the fœtid vault; and he encumbered, too, with the poor little girl to save whose life Tom would freely have risked his own.

He himself heard the wild yells of the infuriated Hamet, as the red light of torches glared through the bars at the top of the flood gates.

He looked wildly round for the steps which the child had said would lead them out into the blessed free air of heaven; but the pale glimmering l ght in the lanthorn only s rved to show the blank space yawning before them, and the loathsome rats, larger than a full grown kitten, either squatting on the damp earth, or gamboling athwart his path.

"Let me carry you child," he exclaimed, offering to take Snowdrop in his arms, but she hurriedly answered.

"No no, we should lose our way, here, here, we must run, I could find the steps blindfolded: and see there they are!"

As the child spoke she swung the lanthorn over her head, and dimly amid the gloom, Tom Starling perceived in the distance, a flight of stone stairs, very steep, and in all respects similar to those which he had lately descended, save that there was no wall or protec ing balustrade on either s de of them. They were almost as perpendicular as a ladder.

T m and his young companion might have been about fifty paces distant from the stairs when the noise of Hamet's continued yells and threatening cries was mingled with the hide us screeching jar of the flood-gates as they were thrown suddenly back. and the roar of the water, as black as ink, and emitting a horrible putrid smell, it poured into the narrow vault through which the fugitives were passing. In a minute Tom was up to his waist, ere he could reach the stairs he was out of his depth.

Simultaneously with the bursting in of the water he had caught the child up on his left arm; but though she had valorously, and with admirable forethought, held the lantern high above her head, yet when Tom lost his d pth the water rushed in, and the feeble light was extinguished.

Blindly the poor fellow now swam in what he could best calculate was the direction of the steps; with his right arm only, for he had cast away the iron bar, which might have proved so useful a defensive weapon.

So he struggled through the fœtid waters supporting Snowdrop on his left arm, and half choked with rank effluvia and dashing aside the monster rats, who appeared to be swimming about in myriads.

One of these ferocious creatures at length fastened on Tom's hand in the attempt to shake it off he was losing his depth, when, as in his fury he dashed his hand aside to loosen the gripe of the vermin, whose horrible teeth had fastened in his flesh, he struck it violently against some hard substance.

Then little Snowdrop, trying to withdraw herself from his grasp, exclaimed.

"The stairs, the stairs, we are safe." A gleam of red light at that moment flickered over the inky waters, it proceeded from a torch held by Hamet, who had climbed up to the top of the gates which had been closed so soon as the waters had been let through them.

He hoped to see his victims struggling or sinking in the loathsome waters: and his murderous malice defeated its own object; for the glare of the torch, momentary as it was, gave Tom illumination enough to enable him to secure his footing on the steps.

The quick-eyed Oriental was immediately cognisant of the escape of his proposed victims, which he unwittingly aided, by remaining with the torch still upheld, glaring at them, in the stupefaction of his rage, watching little Snowdrop cautiously mounting the steps, followed by the young sailor.

They had nearly reached the summit, when, with a yell of disappointed fury, Hamet hurled his torch into the waters, where it hissed, flared up for a moment, and then expired, leaving the fugitives to conclude their perilous ascent in total darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEMIREP AND THE ROUE—PRIDE VERSUS POVERTY—A WOMAN'S LAST JEALOUSIES—THE CONSENT OF POVERTY, NOT WILL.

THERE is something very exasperating in the contrasts of social position. We do not require the after all courtly poet to remind us that, since—

"Order is Heaven's first law; and that confest,
Some are, and must be, greater than the rest."

But, at the same time, neither philosophy, nor that purer guide, Christianity, can at all times gift us with the power to contemplate patiently the hard lot of suffering virtue, and the hot-bed luxuries of rampant vice.

It is not true that the wicked always get their punishment in this world, and the virtuous their reward. There is a false morality in the principle, which is not inculcated either by religion or sound philosophy.

It is a fallacy, an amiable impatience of generous hearts, and noble minds, which, disgusted and indignant at vice, cannot and will not believe that its punishment can ever be deferred.

Alas this fallacy was the sole consolation of one, whose own unregarded virtues, and unrecognised genius were the most melancholy proof of its egregiousness.

Oh no, seldom it is that virtue has its reward, or vice its punishment here. A happiness and a glory more transcendant than all the thrones and powers of this world can give; awaits the first, a punishment more dreadful than all the majesty of human law can inflict, is surely in store for the last.

The honest man, the chaste woman, too often must bear with the sight of the thief and the harlot revelling in luxury, while they are wanting bread.

Nor is it circumstance merely that is the parent of vice, in some instances it may aggravate, but it rarely originates.

Some flaw in the diamond there must be when it is dug out of the mine, some canker in the rosebud at its birth.

We utterly repudiate and disclaim the principle of certain modern philosophers, who contend that we are all born virtuous, we maintain the old fashioned faith that we are

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born sinful, and heart and soul we humbly join in the pitiful cry of the Psalmist.

"Behold I was conceived in iniquities, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Specks of whiteness pale gleams of the glory of the lost angels may indeed, at times, glimmer amid the gloom of a darkened soul. But alas, and alas, the relenting moment, the capricious kindness, are oftener to be found among the criminals, whose rashness has exposed them to the operations of the laws, than to the vicious whose cunning has evaded them.

There are two classes of criminals, the first are hardened, obdurate wretches, whose souls, even in infancy, seemed brethed into their bodies by a spirit of hell.

No nurture, no education, no kindness, no severity, makes aught of difference in those depraved creatures. From this class are furnished such monsters as Jerry Abershaw, who murdered his mother. Mrs. Manning, who roasted a dinner in a stove over the body of her paramour, whom she had shot, and at almost the present hour, the incarnate fiend Youngman, and the destestable Ann Padwick, whom a maudlin sentimentality saved from the gallows, after she had brutally murdered her own poor infant of three months old.

In thinking of the escape from earthly punishment of this last named female monster, we thank God for our belief in hell!

In referring to Ann Padwick, who at five and twenty years of age pretended, that she was the victim of a boy of eighteen, we would humbly suggest as a remedy for the rapid increase of the revolting crime of infanticide, that a Jury of Matrons should be empannelled to adjudge the accused. As the child murdering mother would most certainly be then condemned to her just desert, the gallows, the chances are ten to a hundred, that public decency would be less frequently shocked by newspaper details of the bodies of innocent babes found murdered in the streets and highways.

Those fiendly mothers, who give birth to children in their wolfish licentiousness, and murder them in their worse than wolfish cruelty, have a wholesome fear of the hangman.

The before named Anne Padwick shrieked and raved in her fear of the rope for her own neck, though she had no fear in slaying her own infant of three months old, and cutting its body to pieces as a butcher cuts up a lamb for the shambles.

Not this class of criminal, was poor Caroline Andrews. The most lost and abandoned of women in a social sense, are perhaps the least capable of that, saving parricide, most awful form of blood guiltiness, child murder. They are too weak, truly generous, too kind at heart, even in the midst of their degradation.

Flash Carry was one of those criminals with whose irreparable infamy circumstance has much to do, though even in her case, circumstance could not fairly be called upon to account for all.

Caroline Andrews was vain and sensual, and it was possible that under any circumstances she might have fallen, her poverty was the circumstance that, it deprived her of every chance. Had Caroline, however, been rich instead of poor, wealth would have cast a veil over her sins.

Poor wretch, the full penalty of wrong doing was exacted from her: while not only the titled wanton who is paraded in the homilies of moralists, or if there were no women of evil character save in her class and that of Flash Carry. But the well to do wives of thriving tradesmen, of clerks, and men whose business keeps them much away from home

They "do let heaven see the tricks
They dare not show their husbands."

These middle class ladies? the tone of whose morals has been so charmingly developed under the auspices of the late Sir Creswell Creswell, not unfrequently hide from their husbands the tricks they show to heaven, and with their own vice securely screened, pour the full vials of virtuous indignation on the unhappy wretches whom Poverty with her scorpion lash has scourged to the pit of perdition.

Originally, one of these most iniquitous women of the middle classes was the Baroness Fitzwalter, whom Mr. Amery's wealth had bribed to chaperon his daughters in the world of fashion.

At seventeen years of age Lady Fitzwalter had been married to a rich attorney old enough to be her grandfather, let it not be supposed that she was cruelly forced into this marriage by hard hearted avaricious parents; the hard heartedness and cupidity were all her own.

Her father was a prosperous tradesman,; and a worthy and goodlooking young man, in easy circumstances, was as much smitten with her beauty as the old lawyer Selwyn.

All of love that Laura Morton had to bestow, that is to say the low species of love which is awakened by youth and good looks she had given to Charles Ripon, before Mr Selwyn made his proposals.

Laura Morton liked Charles Ripon for his handsome person and pleasant manners. She was quite incapable of estimating his cultivated mind or honest heart; and Charles had only about three hundred a-year from the profits of his business, at present; while Laura longed for jewels, fine clothes, and a carriage; all of which would be possessed by the wife of Mr. Selwyn. So she married the old lawyer, even against the advice of her father, who understood, and was disgusted with, her venality. Charles Ripon was a little mortified at Laura's marriage—she had given him such unmistakeable encouragement. But men so honest and upright as Charles Ripon soon overcome the pain caused to them by a temporary weakness for a worthless woman. He soon found a pretty and sensible girl, worthy enough herself to value his worth; and, when she became his wife, he congratulated himself on Laura's baseness.

Both parties were well satisfied; for Laura's heart never pained her. She only, when entering into all the dissipations in which her husband's wealth enabled her to indulge, hugged herself for the wisdom which threw off Charles Ripon, who never could have afforded such luxuries.

However shrewd and far seeing Mr. Selwyn might be in his profession—and he had an ample allowance of the lawyer's cunning—he believed, with a blind faith, in his beautiful young wife.

Mrs. Selwyn, meanwhile, was liberal in lavishing her husband's wealth. The parties she gave were so splendid, that the ladies of her acquaintance found it expedient to countenance her and shut their eyes to her shameful flirtations: her dinners and balls were so magnificent—they had so good a chance at her house of picking up a husband for their daughters, sisters, or themselves.

Mrs. Selwyn's license of manners, however, soon passed the bounds of mere flirtation; and the waiting-maid, as usual, was the confidante that could not be evaded.

But gold, if it would not seal up the girl's eyes, at any rate bridled her tongue.

Among the most distinguished of the admirers of Mrs. Selwyn was a young Irish nobleman, one of her husband's clients.

Lord Fitzwalter was a young man, with the free dashing manner of his nation, a handsome face, a long pedigree and a small estate, or rather an income made small by heavy mortgages on his land.

To raise mortgages, and to eke out his narrow means, the young nobleman became the client of Mr. Selwyn, who had been recommended to him as the man of all others to manage his affairs.

So intimate then became their connection that Mr. Selwyn invited Lord Fitzwalter to his house, and as far as his wife was concerned, the guileless, and doting old man was flattered by the undisguised admiration of the young lord for his beautiful Laura.

Mrs. Selwyn vain, unprincipled, and in the flower of her youth and beauty, was not a woman to play the prude.

She admired Lord Fitzwalter as much as he did her, and she took care to make him acquainted with the fact.

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This species of admiration between such a man and such a woman speedly became a criminal passion, over which both parties cunningly threw the veil of outward decorum, indeed after her levity had become guilt, Mrs. Selwyn retrenched the license of her manners and cried "fie! fie! at little breaches of decorum at which she had formerly laughed.

Servants to such a woman as Mrs. Selwyn became spies, and from her waiting maid she could not conceal her guilt.

A confidante of this sort, however, was especially irksome to Mrs. Selwyn, as she was a haughty and tyrannical mistress, as women elevated in the sphere of life usually are.

The waiting maid on the other hand took liberties on the strength of her knowledge, of her lady's short comings, and upon one occasion when she absented herself without leave, when her mistress required her services. Mrs. Selwyn was so imprudent as to rate the girl soundly.

Then the servant ventured upon threats, the mistress was compelled to condescend to apologies, and in the end to, as she thought patch up the quarrel by giving the maid a silk dress, after which blazing with jewels and in high spirits, she went to attend a splendid ball.

Mr. Selwyn had been indisposed for some days, and could not quit the house, and his wife hypocritically offered to give up the ball. Of this the doting old man would not hear, but desired his darling to come and look at him in his library, before she set out, that he might admire her beauty and jewels.

The old gentleman was looking very ill that evening, but the heart of the traitress did not reproach her, when he kissed her and bade her not return early on his account as he should go to bed after seeing his principal clerk, who was to bring him the draft of his will.

The infamous woman went to the ball in high spirits, for she knew that in that will the whole of her husband's large fortune was bequeathed to her. She met Lord Fitzwalter at the ball and told him so, and the pair rejoiced in the thought that the duped and aged husband would not live long.

This end was nearer than even those guilty wretches contemplated.

Mrs. Selwyn returned from the ball at about four o'clock on a raw sharp morning. She was in high spirits, for she needed no flatterers to tell her that she had been pre-eminent in beauty, and the display of costly jewels.

As she entered her dressing-room the waiting maid rose yawning and rubbing her eyes, out of an easy chair.

Mrs. Selwyn inquired of the girl at what time her master had retired, and was told that she did not know, as after taking his arrowroot, Mr. Selwyn had told the servants they might go to bed with one exception, that of the man who was to sit up for his mistress.

A strange fear of she knew not what seemed at that moment to thrill over the insensible heart of Mrs. Selwyn.

She snatched a blazing taper from the dressing table, and rushed into her husband's apartment which communicated with her dressing room. He was not in bed, the bed had not been disturbed. The library opened out of Mr. Selwyn's chamber, and with the dread sickness of mortal terror the guilty wife rushed into it.

The fire had gone out, the Argand lamps were burning low, the table was strewed with papers, and Mr. Selwyn lying back in his easy chair. His wife held the taper over him. The fixed features, the fallen jaw, the glazed eyes, that seemed to stare menacingly at her through the dull film that clouded them, told the truth at once without a sound.

Mr. Selwyn was dead!

A shriek of horror rose to his wife's lips, but she choked it down; for in the clenched hand she perceived a crumpled letter.

Guilt is ever suspicious of attempts to tear away its mask.

With some difficulty, Mrs. Selwyn drew the paper from the stiffening hand; but, even before glancing at its contents, she looked eagerly among the papers on the table.

All was safe; there lay her husband's will, duly attested, and leaving to her the whole of his fortune.

Amid the terror which she could not but feel, a wicked smile crossed her pale lips as she opened the letter which she had taken from her dead husband.

She did not fear to read it now. The letter was one which some days before she had entrusted her maid to deliver to Lord Fitzwalter, and which the girl had treacherously retained, and, no doubt, that very evening handed to her master.

Even that hardened woman staggered, and turned sick.

The letter fully revealed the nature of her intimacy with Lord Fitzwalter: it had, doubtless, been her husband's death-blow. It had killed him—it had killed that kind generous old man in the very hour when, by executing such a will, he had shown his boundless love, joy, and confidence in her.

Mrs. Selwyn tottered, rather than walked, back to her chamber.

"Wretch!" she said to the waiting-maid, who stood up stark and frightened at her horrified aspect, "Look at this! You have killed your master. The poor old man, he might have been left in ignorance—which to him, indeed, was bliss."

Then, with a hand that trembled, Mrs. Selwyn held the fatal letter in the flame of the taper till it was consumed—ord red the girl, who obeyed in frightened silence, to arouse the other servants—and, sinking upon a couch, gave way to a fit of hysteric weeping.

Mrs. Selwyn soon recovered from the shock which even her obdurate nature had sustained from the death of her husband, of whom she felt at first as if she was the actual murderess.

Time, however, blunted even this slight feeling of self-reproach; and she excused herself upon the plea that her guilt never would have been known to her husband save through the treachery and malice of the servant; and that on that woman fell the crime of having hastened Mr. Selwyn's death. In fine, as Mrs. Selwyn shook off the notion that she was responsible for the fearful catastrophe, she began to consider that for her it was a fortunate one, as Mr. Selwyn, had he lived, would assuredly have altered his will.

So soon as a due regard to the exterior of decency permitted, Mrs. Selwyn threw off the weeds which were indeed in her case "a mockery of woe," and married Lord Fitzwalter.

With him she lived for many years, on such terms of happiness as might have been expected, from the circumstances under which the connection commenced.

Their attachment was based only on worldly interests, and intemperate passions. A brief period of unholy rapture for both parties, and then came satiety, to be speedily followed by indifference and discord.

They quarrelled fiercely for sometime on the subject of money, as Mrs. Selwyn had not been so blinded by her infatuation for her noble husband, but that she had taken care to maintain authority over her own fortune.

These quarrels were, however, suddenly brought to a close, and my lady induced to accede to what her lord called his reasonable demand, the reasonableness consisting in the surrender of two thirds of her fortune to her husband's disposal.

When Lord Fitzwalter boasted of this among his associates, the vast men of those days, they swore at him for a devilish lucky fellow, and wished that fortune had favoured them with wives so wealthy, and so docile. His lordship did not think it necessary to inform his friends that he had detected his wife, to use a very mild word, in new flirtations and that as the lady wished to preserve the repute of an honest woman, to retain the privilege of appearing even at the court of the fastidious and austere Queen Charlotte, and at the same time to enjoy the license it a lady, not so strait laced in her morals, she had found of expedient to purchase silence and immunity from her

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husband, at the expense of the greater portion of her fortune.

From that time forward Lord and Lady Fitzwalter lived upon the most charming terms of utter disunion, neither party in any way interfered with the other, they were now so supremely indifferent that their great dispute on the subject of money being settled, they did not even like each other enough to dislike.

Thus when Lord Fitzwalter died his widow, who had long past the zenith of her attractions, felt neither satisfaction nor sorrow, she did not care that he was out of her way, and she would not have cared had he remained in it.

A real source of misery to Lady Fitzwalter, though was her waning beauty, and her diminished fortune.

Capital and interest, Lord Fitzwalter had squandered all of Mr. Selwyn's fortune that had been surrendered to him.

A very insignificant jointure was secured to his widow on his paternal estates—which, with his title, went to a distant cousin, as Lady Fitzwalter had had no children. Upon this small jointure, however, and the wreck of her own fortune, Lady Fitzwalter was compelled to live for the remainder of her life, as all her arts failed to secure for her a third husband.

Insignificant, however, as was her income, Lady Fitzwalter was greatly admired for the combination of taste and economy in the expenditure.

The Fitzwalter jointure, however, was on the Irish estates. Lady Fitzwalter detested the country in general, and Ireland in particular. She was too cold—too selfish—to estimate the really fine points of the whimsical Irish character. So she sold her right of occupying the dwelling to the new Lord Fitzwalter, who bestowed it on an aged and infirm aunt, the sister of his mother.

Lady Fitzwalter complained that her narrow means would not allow her the necessary, as she termed it, of a town-house; but she had a most charming suburban abode at Kensington—not too near the palace, but within an easy distance of it.

The house was a perfect gem—a charming little villa built on an Italian model, with walls of white stone and a portico of white marble, which retained its original purity, as the house was far enough from town to escape the London smoke, which, eighty years ago, was not the grimy vapour which the overgrown proportions of the capital have since made it.

The prim continental style, too, prevailed in the garden, which was laid out in trim shrubberies, and fantastically carved parterres, with a fountain, where a figure of Narcissus leaned over the basin, contemplating his own beauty in the water, which he poured from a shell.

The quaintly cut flower beds, gleaming with all the rainbows tints throughout the spring and summer, where the glittering tulip and bright anemone, were succeeded by the lily and the rose, which again gave place to the rich hued clove carnation, the glowing geranium and the grey heliotrope, were suited after all, to a small demesne, and to the style of the dwelling house.

Certainly Lady Fitzwalter must have been a model housewife and economist, that upon her small income she would not only keep her dainty garden cultivated to perfection, exhibit her house provided with equal luxury and taste, with carpets that in their glowing colors looked as if the flower beds had been transferred from the garden to the house, with curtains of velvet, and satin, and lace, fringed and trimmed with gold bullion, with tables and sideboards of variegated marble, and costly inlaid woods, with gorgeous cabinets and screens from India and Japan, with unheard of treasures in porcelain; tea and coffee services from Severes and Dresden, grotesque monsters, mandarins, and strange gods from China, glittering glass from Bohemia, to have her house as it were brimful and running over with costly and beautiful things, and with all this to keep a wardrobe never behind the fashion, and of materials the most tasteful and expensive, and more over give the most exquisite little dinner and supper parties, all, all out of her small income, Lady Fitzwalter was an economist, and contriver indeed. Financiers might have taken a lesson from her.

It is true there were some malicious little birds, who whispered that Lady Fitzwalter's little income did not furnish all these fine things, that her glittering toy house cost her no thing, and was the the main source of her income.

Her parties were of a peculiar nature, the gayest and most fashionable men were among her visitors, the loveliest womens' wit found its place at her table, Charles Fox and Richard Brinsley Sheridan had adorned the bright circle with their brighter intellect, royalty itself favoured Lady Fitzwalter, for the Prince of Wales himself had more than once been her guest.

The little birds did not belie Lady Fitzwalter. Simsovina Villa—for so was the mansion called, from the Italian style of its architecture—was, in fact, a private gambling-house; and the gambling was in beauty sometimes, as well as cards and dice.

Strange that these things did not get whispered at court; that Lady Fitzwalter was still received by starch Queen Charlotte! Queen Charlotte did not know everything; and, perhaps, as to the things she did know, she found it expedient sometimes to shut her eyes—strict and prudish as she was. Her Majesty could not live for ever in hot water; much of her time was occupied in squabbles with the King; of which the theme in general was, her fondness for the hopeful heir of the crown—His Royal Highness, George Augustus, Prince of Wales—and his Majesty's preference for his son Frederick, the Duke of York.

The poor dear, rough, good-natured, and not over-wise sailor king, William (whom those not very far advanced in life can remember in their childhood), was a favourite neither with his father nor mother—a kind of scape-goat of the Royal Family: and so, for that matter, was Edward Duke of Kent, the father of Queen Victoria.

How averse seems Providence to the phantasies of poor mortals! Of these two princes, so little heeded by their royal parents in their youth—who had to rough the world, as soldier and sailor, as much as sons of the King of Great Britain could rough it—the one was to mount the throne when the favoured George died of premature old age; and the other, through his daughter, was to be the father of future kings.

Lady Fitzwalter, then, in spite of the naughty whispers about her, still was admissible at the drawing rooms, More than that, in spite of her doubtful origin, she was *bon ton*. Certainly, she was distinguished in her manners, and not deficient in wit. Mr. Amery thought himself, and was thought by others, to be very fortunate in having secured the friendship and patronage of Lady Fitzwalter to introduce his daughters to society.

On the night when Flash Curry was so nearly murdered by her Eastern lover, at about the same hour when Tom Starling and little Snowdrop were struggling in the putrid waters that filled the horrible dungeon, Lady Fitzwalter was entertaining a small party at her fairy-like house at Kensington.

None of the wits of the day, and no person of very eminent rank, were present. Poor foolish Lord Annesley was there; so, also, was Sir Miles Cressingham. For the rest, the company was made up of one or two city men, who were so foolish as to suffer themselves to be deceived at cards, for the doubtful honour, and very silly boast, that they were friends of Lady Fitzwalter, at whose house the Prince visited, and where they had themselves met earls, marquisses, dukes—in short, all the five orders of nobility.

These city men were rich to be sure, or Lady Fitzwalter would have had none of them, and the persons with whom they were playing at whist did not look like noblemen, but rather realized an imagination of men who with a certain sort of gentlemanly manner which utterly dupes the novice, lounge about first class gambling houses, and the purlieus of the race course, and who obtain their living with little work and much dishonesty.

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The city men, and Lord Annesly were the pigeons to be plucked upon this occasion, which Lady Fitzwalter called one of her private parties. namely a party at which no person, very distinguished, was present, and when she therefore could venture to let loose her experienced gamblers, upon the aforesaid pigeons, who ought after all to have been content to sacrifice their plumage, to such a distinguished piece of treachery as Lady Fitzwalter.

Lady Fitzwalter was sitting in conversation with Sir Miles Cressingham in her second drawing-room, a lovely little apartment hung with azure blue satin, each compartment had a border of rose leaves wrought in pink and silver; between the sections of the wall, covered with the blue satin were pier glasses in magnificent Louis Quartoize frames of burnished and dead gold, that lined the vacant space from floor to ceiling, in front of these pier glasses were tables of lapiz lazuli, on which stood vases of Dresden porcelain filled with hothouse flowers.

The ceiling was painted in compartments, with the story of Cupid and Psyche, the pictures framed as it were in high relief gold mountings. The painter who executed these pictures must have had a rare genius to give such richness of tone, and grace of expression to fresco. He had however dealt so freely with the lovely story of Apulius, that he had reft it of all its spirituality, and whether the theme was Psyche persuaded by her wicked sister, that her lover was a fiend, or with the fatal lamp in her hand she bent fearfully over the sleeping god, to discover that she was wedded to the essence of all beauty and excellence, to love him elf, still there was an arrangement of the scant drapery, a look that reminded the beholder, rather of the love which fed grossly upon flesh, than that which was nourished with roses.

Folding doors of satin wood with gold mouldings, at one end of this luxurious apartment opened into the large drawing-room, a spacious chamber, richly furnished with amber satin and silver, with rose wood furniture, inlaid with mother of pearl.

At the other end of the blue room, were a pair of glass doors opening on a conservatory abundantly stocked with rare plants, many of them brought from the tropics, and at that time more expensive to purchase then they are now.

The queen of this fairy abode, though she had lived twenty years longer than she cared to tell—and she owned to forty—did not appear nigh so old, seen in the softly-veiled light of the lamps, with their globes of pink ground-glass, hung from the ceiling with silver chains; and she well became the splendour that surrounded her.

Yes, Lady Fitzwalter was now fifty-eight years of age; and with the aid of a most elaborate toilette, of pearl-powder, rouge, and false hair, combined with the utmost richness and tastefulness of attire, she was still a very handsome woman. Her teeth were still white and perfect.

It must be remembered that in her youth she had been very beautiful; and beauty, to a certain extent, is youth. Handsome people look young much longer than ugly ones.

Lady Fitzwalter's beauty, too, was of the class to wear well. She had no hard outlines—no angles—either in face or figure. Her features were straight and delicate; her skin, in youth, was of that lovely pinky transparency—as if thin white silk was laid over the blush rose—which is peculiar to English beauty. Her eyes were blue; not dark, like the violet, but azure and limpid, like the sapphire. The hair was of that pale, faintest, tint of brown, called ashy-blond. In her youth, this fine light hair had been very abundant. It still preserved its colour; for hair of that peculiar tint never does turn grey: but, alas! and alas! for vanity, it had fallen off very much of late years, and her ladyship, horrible to relate, was almost bald.

It was with some trouble that the fashionable hairdresser matched the almost colourless hair of her ladyship; and he flattered her very much on that account. He did match it, however; and the skill of her maid mixed the abundant locks of youth gracefully with the tresses of age.

Powder was going out of fashion; and even when it was worn, Lady Fitzwalter would never endure more than the slightest puff of it. In addition to the loss of her hair, there was another indication of advancing age that terribly distressed Lady Fitzwalter: she was getting fat—really unmistakeably fat.

With all the luxury that surrounded her, Lady Fitzwalter was one of the most unhappy of women.

She had so enjoyed her youth, she had in secret so given the rein to all its wildest passions, that she was frantic at the prospect of advancing age. She was naturally fond of cards, and the high play at her house was the main source of her income, but she abhorred the thought of being classed with antiquated card playing dowagers.

Her poverty compelled her to play the part of chaperon to Mr. Amery's daughters, but her will would have been to execrate them to their faces for the beauty which in her was on the wane, and the to her admirable attraction of youth, which she had lost altogether.

Lady Fitzwalter was really the most unhappy of women, for though youth was gone, its wild unrestrained passions remained to her, burning with the dull concentrated heat of middle age. Her juvenility and beauty had lasted so long that she hated to find them at last leaving her. She hated to think herself old, for she was as vain and frivolous as if she had been but eighteen.

The consciousness of her advancing years had perhaps been more forced upon her by her contact with the daughters of Mr Amery, than any other circumstance, for the handsome and fashionable men, who had once been supplicating for her smiles, now only entreated her, now only implored her interest on their behalf, with her lovely protegees, whom Lady Fitzwalter hated with due bitterness accordingly, for she was not indifferent to masculine homage.

As she sat there in her splended drawing room on the occasion refered to, robed in rich brocade and with diamonds glittering on her neck and arms, while her lip was wreathed in smiles more than the venom of aspics was swelling in her heart.

Sir Miles Cresingham sat beside her, and this woman of fifty-eight years was as much infatuated with Sir Miles as was Alice Amery who was thirty years her junior. but Lady Fitzwalter calculated and with truth, that she did not look her age, for ten or twelve years even by daylight. and if the sagacious and glorious Queen Elizabeth indulged, as even philosophic David Hume allows, in little amourettes, at the age of sixty-five, why not Laura Fitzwalter at only fifty-eight.

It was the outline of a devilish plot, that Sir Miles whispered to Lady Fitzwalter, in that luxurious and perfumed chamber, on that evening, and her heart, which perverted as it was, was womans still, even in the excess of its weakness and its guilt, revolted at the atrocity of the mans's designs, and looking up she said, "But Sir Miles, she is such a mere child, this Florence Amery, she is so innocent, so young, would not that full blown rose of beauty her sister Alice, be better worth the plucking, why would you tear the poor little violet from the shade, to bruise and crush and trample it beneath your feet."

"You have grown poetical dear Lady Fitzwalter," said Sir Miles with a sneer—

"As to the innocence and youth I do not doubt when you were as young you were also as innocent. I do not doubt," he added changing to a more gallant accent, "that you were also as beautiful. and as to taking pity on the innocence, why my dear Lady Fitzwalter it is the innocence that gives piquancy to the whole affair, such perfect innocence is so very charming, because we seldom meet with it."

Lady Fitzwalter gnawed her nether lip, this man for half a word of love from whom her heart hungered. so clearly implied that for her the days of youth, and also of beauty were long past.

Oh it is a frightful destiny when passion will not die with years, and the heart refuses to grow old.

The last words of Sir Miles some what consoled Lady Fitzwalter for the pain which his preceding ones had inflicted.

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INTERIOR OF THE "JOLLY TAR."

'Then there is Burd Ellinor, as the old ballad mongers, would have called her, the queen of pride as surely as Alice is the queen of beauty, oh Lady Fitzwalter, such pride as hers quite spoils a pretty woman. The fair Ellinor disdains the power of love, she is guilty of high treason in the Court of Cupid, and must be duly humbled for the offence!"

Lady Fitzwalter hated Ellinor Amery most intensely, she suspected, and not without reason, that the keen witted and high minded girl had pierced through the veil of hypocrisy under which she concealed her real character, and held her accordingly in due contempt, which contempt she repaid with the most deadly hate.

Lady Fitzwalter, however, on her part, also understood the character of Ellinor, she was convinced that she had no infatuation for Sir Miles, and she replied with some irony.

"And have you taken upon yourself also the task of fascinating Ellinor, I doubt not, you will be involved in a long siege before you subdue either her heart or her pride!"

"You mistake me, dear Lady Fitzwalter," answered Sir Miles; "I have neither the vanity nor the industry to make the attempt."

The last words scarce left the lips of Sir Miles, when the Marquis of Bridgnorth was announced; and a remarkably handsome man was ushered into the little drawing-room.

Sir Miles rose, and, extending his hand, said:

"How fares it with Ellinor the inaccessible? I have just been speaking of her to Lady Fitzwalter. I disclaim all hopes in that quarter. The laurels are for your gathering: only, knight of romance, as you are in appearance, beware that you do not lose them by really acting on the principles of chivalry."

The marquis threw back his head, somewhat impatiently, scattering from his fine forehead a wealth of silky ebon curls, the gloss of which fashion had never tempted him to dim with powder.

The morality of the marquis was as lax as that of any

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man of his class. Circumstances, and a certain vein of romance in his disposition, had led him, when only twenty-two years of age, to contract what had proved a most unfortunate and incompatible marriage. He had borne patiently for three years the exactions of an invalid and jealous wife, till, at length, he broke the rein which had been drawn too tight, and, for another three years, sought enjoyment anywhere but at home.

Chance had introduced him to Ellinor Amery in the character of a poor artist; and, for the first time in his life, the marquis felt real love—that passion which is so strongly inspired when every charm of intellect and manner is united to the attractions of youth and beauty.

Sir Miles had wormed himself into the confidence of the marquis, and, Mephistopheles-like, tempted him to designs from which the better nature of the young nobleman shrank, and which, probably, he never would have conceived.

There certainly was a chivalry in his character, as well as his appearance; and the remorse, the misgivings, which tortured him with the conviction that he ought to forbear in his pursuit of Ellinor, only intensified his passion, and increased her danger.

It galled him to hear her name so lightly mentioned by Sir Miles.

A fierce struggle, a terrible temptation, was preparing for Ellinor. A gulf was opening at her feet; and one in angel guise would tempt her to the brink.

She was in no danger from such a man as Sir Miles; she could forget in her scorn the falsehood of her early lover.

But a man handsome — accomplished — as high-minded as herself—one who shrunk from the impulse of his own passions, who held her chaste as snow, pure as a lily newly blown—who would curse himself in his success, whose heart would weep tears of blood over her ruin—there was, indeed, peril for the noble Ellinor in the love of such a man!

CHAPTER XII.

THE ESCAPE OF TOM STARLING—RED REUBEN—THE BOAT UPON THE DARK RIVER—THE PISTOL SHOT—POOR CRAZY JANE.

With toil and trouble, but yet in safety, Tom Starling and Snowdrop reached the summit of the slimy steps that led out of the inundated vault.

A low-browed door, deep sunk in the wall, was standing partly open at the top of the stairs; and Tom Starling inhaled the free air from without.

As Tom Starling and Snowdrop crossed the threshold of this door, a human form, which had been crouching there, rose up suddenly.

Thinking it was one of the murderous band of Lascars who had been lying there in waiting, Tom Starling involuntary recoiled and made a step backward towards the vault.

"Come on sir, come on," said Snowdrop eagerly "it is all right, it's only poor Red Reuben;" "yes!" answered the person so named, and who in the dim and fitful light shed by the moon as she careered among the eddying clouds, Tom Starling judged to be a youth about sixteen or seventeen years, "yes poor Reuben, Red Reuben. Flash Carry told him to come here to watch for Snowdrop, and Reuben would have dived down, for all the water, and the water rats, but Carry told him that would do Snowdrop no good, but that Reuben must wait here, and tell Snowdrop to go down Deadman's lane, that Dick Daring is waiting there with a boat, and with Snowdrop's mother."

"Good boy, good Reuben," answered Snowdrop speaking to the lad who was tall and muscular for his apparent age, as though he had been a little child, and she a grown up person.

Reuben is very good, but now Reuben must go home or the Spider will be angry, and take the cruel stick or the whip to poor Reuben, and then when Reuben is all over bruises, it will make Snowdrop cry."

"Snowdrop must not cry!" said the youth who continued to walk beside the child as she hurried Tom Starling down a dark noisome alley, which went by the ominous epithet of Deadman's Lane.

Ramshackled ruinous tenements reared their unsightly walls on either side of this alley, which sloped downwards almost to the very banks of the river, where its waves lapped the rough dirty stones, reeking often with the refuse thrown down by the slatternly women, who with their children, husbands or paramours, herded in the tottering tenements which were alike the abode of filth and misery.

The poor idiot for such was Red Reuben, shuffled after the sailor and Snowdrop, as fast as a pair of clumsy old shoes, much to large for him, would admit.

"Do go Reuben!" said Snowdrop as they neared the foot of the steep descent, and Tom Starling clearly descried a wherry rocking on the rising tide, and containing two persons, a man who held the oars, and a woman.

"Do go, dear Reuben," reiterated Snowdrop, "you know how cruel the Spider is when he is angry, and how soon he gets angry with you!"

"Snowdrop always sends Reuben away," replied the poor creature in a sobbing voice, "let Reuben kiss her hand before he goes, her dear little white hand!"

As the idiot spoke he snatched at the delicate little member, the beauty of which had impressed even his dazed brain, then his own hand fell on the wet mud, and ragged garments of the little girl.

"Snowdrop is wet," he exclaimed in an accent of horror, "the waters have been let into the vault, and Snowdrop will be cold. Have Reuben's coat, he does not care for the cold, it will not hurt him."

Hastily as he spoke the poor wretch stripped off his ragged coat leaving his chest and shoulders screened from the biting blast only by a thin shirt. He wanted to wrap his miserable garment round li tle Snowdrop. "No, no, dear Reuben, keep your coat," said the child. "Dick Daring will soon row me and mother over to our lodging, so you go home; just to please Snowdrop, Red Rueben."

"Yes go home young man, go home!" said crazy Jane rising up in the boat, which the party had now reached, so suddenly, that as the tide was high it shipped some water, and she got a reprimand from the oarsman. Crazy Jane however whose brains since her journey into the country, seemed possessed with new and strange notions of her daughter's importance, as Tom Starling lifted the little girl into the boat, waved her hand disdainfully to poor Reuben who stood shivering at the water's edge, and said in a haughty tone. "Go home Reuben, what will the servants think to see such a figure as you are, get into the carriage. Go home poor boy, we shall not forget you, I will send some money to buy you some new clothes, and then you can come sometimes, and see my daughter, but you must not call her Snowdrop, her name is—her name is!"——

The intellect of poor Jane even more bewildered than that of the boy Reuben, would not furnish her with the name of her daughter, but true to the sense of her own importance, she again waved her hand to the boy, and sat down spreading her tattered garments over the thwarts of the boat, with the air of a fine lady composing herself in her carriage.

Poor Reuben dropped his coat, and covering his face with his hands, stood shivering and sobbing in the bitter wind.

"Dont cry, dear Reuben," said Snowdrop.

"Dont cry!" said the waterman, "why Reuben, I thought even thee had sense enow, not to care for the airs and graces of Crazy Jane, when she takes herself for a lady!" An blame thee for a fool, though to be sure the poor critter can't help that "concluded Dick Daring, as the boy still stood crying at the water side. Then the waterman addressed Tom Starling who having helped the child, into the boat hesitated as if doubtful whether he should accompany her.

"I am just agoing to row the woman and gal across to Rotherhithe mate, and thee had better put the river atwixt thee and them cut-throat black fellows, till they are off the scent for an hour or so!"

"But my comrades!" urged Tom.

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"They is all right!" answered Dick the waterman "old Stedman has looked arter them, it isn't them as the blacks is so vicious against, it is you, so come along and make no more palaver, I can give you some dry clothes, over at my lodgings, for barring that you are soaking wet, which it isn't like as you mind more nor I should: you've not been swimming in sweet waters, I reckon, and hasn't the smell of fresh daises about you.

"Right you are mate," answered Tom, as he stepped into the boat "it seems a lubberly thing though to get off by myself!"

"Your mates are all right! old Stedman has sent them to a safer house than his'n," said the waterman, as he pushed the boat off the shore.

But Reuben remained crying on the strand, he had refused some money that Tom Starling had offered him, honest Tom's kind heart felt for the poor forlorn creature, and he asked Dick if he would not take him aboard.

"Lord love you no," answered Dick, it would be as much as the poor chap's life is worth, if he did not go home to his devil of a father all night."

By this time the strong arms of the two young men, for Tom had taken an oar, had impelled the boat out into the middle of the river.

A pitchy darkness hung over the waters, for the moon was hidden in the clouds, and neither of the stout rowers, had perceived a dark form, which during the little delay in their starting had quietly dropped or rather crept into the water.

A first class swimmer was following the boat, when it neared the the centre of the river, a dark form rose half out of the water. The report of a pistol crashed over the measured strokes of the oar, and Crazy Jane, uttering a wild shriek fell mortally wounded across the knee of Tom Starling, for whom the fatal bullet had been intended.

CHAPTER XIII.

DEATH OF CRAZY JANE.

An exclamation of rage burst from the lips of the Malay Hamet, for he was the desperate swimmer, when he saw that the shot which he had intended for the young English sailor, had lodged in the bosom of the unfortunate woman Crazy Jane.

Hamet was, however, as crafty as he was cruel and revengeful, and the moment he found that his shot had missed the person for whom it was intended, he dived below the bosom of the river.

Hamet did not care to incur the risk of being made prisoner by any of the river police, and these fears rose less from personal apprehension of the penalties of the law, than the certainty that he would be thereby disappointed of his revenge on Tom Starling who had really not given him any cause of offence, but whom the Malay had chosen as the object of his insane jealousy.

The stormy nature of the night or rather morning, for day was by this time fast approaching, favoured Hamet's escape, for thick black clouds still hung low over the surface of the river, obscuring the faint grey tints of the coming dawn. On the minds of the little party in the wherry, there was no doubt as to the hand by which the shot had been fired.

"That black pirate again!" ejaculated Tom with an oath of greater vehemence than usually passed his lips.

"Oh Hamet, Hamet, wailed little Snowdrop "why have you shot poor mother."

"The black thief has dived for it!" said Tom, glancing keenly over the weltering waters that looked inky black in the dull dawning. He cant keep long under water," he muttered, then Tom shipped his oar, and was about to strip off the wet jacket which would have impeded him in swimming when he was stopped by the voice of Dick Daring the waterman.

"Its not no use mate," said Dick, "the black pirate as you rightly calls him has steered off. Lord love you mate, he can keep under water like a fish he can; its not no use you can't catch him if you swims till you goes the bottom with fatigue. Would you just hand me the oar, and you lift up that poor wounded critter, wots choking with blood, and we'll see if we cannot get her ashore, and get her some doctor's help afore she dies."

Tom quietly acquiesced in the waterman's directions, only saying as he helped the poor woman from the bottom of the boat.

"Not so bad as that I hope mate, she wont die, she shall not, she shall not, if all that Tom Starling has earned on his two years trip can pay the doctors to save her."

"I fear as she's clean past the doctors," returned Dick, "you did not see all ,she were struck on the breast mebbee shot through the heart."

Poor Dick the waterman was no surgeon, and was not aware that had Crazy Jane been shot through the heart, she would never have breathed again.

The wound was however mortal though it had escaped the heart, the bullet had passed through the lungs glancing upwards and settling in the right shoulder.

The poor woman was choking with blood incapable of of speech, and the quivering breath was drawn with such torture that each gasp threatened to be the last.

Poor little Snowdrop held her mother's cold hands and wept over them, "mother, mother," was the only word that she uttered between her sobs.

Tom Starling supported the poor creature in his arms, and his strong frame shook under the convulsions of the dying woman, for Tom could have laid her down and wept as little Snowdrop was doing, his manly heart was wrung by the thought that though by accident merely the poor creature's life had been sacrificed for his. Dick the waterman took deep and wide strokes with his oars, bending with herculean strength to his task. And so the boat rapidly neared the shore, the grey clouds in the dull spring dawn, gradually streaked with deep crimson, and throwing a sort of lurid light upon the dark waters. At length Dick Daring threw in his oars, as the keel of the wherry grated on the flat shore.

"There's a decent sort of a public house just anigh here!" he said addressing Tom, "where I goes to smoke a pipe sometimes, stay here a minute mate with the poor critter and the child, and I'll run and get a helping hand to carry her to the house!"

Poor Dick was as good as his word for he ran like a hunted hare up the dirty street in Rotherhithe, the end of which was washed by the river, and Tom Starling and the child were left in the boat with Crazy Jane.

As the crimson rays of the dawn now stole over those livid but still beautiful features, it was with a shudder such as he had never before known that Tom Starling noted there, that terrible seal of death which none who having once seen it can ever mistake again.

Tom Starling had often before encountered death, he had stood beside the bed of the aged, he had seen both his father and his mother die in what was comparatively the prime of life, but old age or sickness were in those cases the ministrants of the dread destroyer, the summons came as it were direct from the hand of God himself, ere the nature and the cruelty of man had summoned him before what appeared his appointed time.

The eyes of Crazy Jane had been closed, but now she opened them suddenly, and there was more of consciousness of the flight of reason in those fast fading but still beautiful black orbs than they had known for years.

There was deep melancholy in the glance which Crazy Jane cast upon her child, for never in the wildest aberrations of her intellect, had she failed to recognize the little girl, or to manifest towards her the most unbounded maternal love.

But it was the instinct of maternity merely—the blind attachment which even the ferocious tigress bears to her young which had hitherto influenced Crazy Jane in her dotage of her child.

But even in that one glance of an eye, over which the film of death was falling, there was more than this animal instinct, beautiful even as manifested by the moment, in most savage animals, but how holy, how divine when the soul of woman unites and strengthens the impulses of her heart.

The woman turned her dying eyes from the pale face of

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Snowdrop, which bathed in tears, looked indeed like the dew steeped flower whose name she bore to the bronzed but handsome and honest countinance of Tom Starling. Crazy Jane strove to speak, but the blood bubbled from her lips in the effort, and the tears of the young sailor fell fast as he wiped the crimson stream away.

A faint colour rose to the cheek of Crazy Jane, and the light of life momentarily brightened and cleared the films from her glazed eye.

She feebly grasped the hand of Tom, and in a broken voice exclaimed.

"My child my child, you look honest, you will not forsake her, oh promise, promise!"

"Never, never, fervently ejaculated the honest tar she shall be my child my little sister!"

Crasy Jane smiled faintly, then again raising her eyes to those of Tom, she feebly murmured. "You are not one of those whom money pays, else you may earn a rich reward, my child she is born in lawful wedlock, they lie. who said it was a false marriage, I have the papers, I hid them, I will tell you where, and we will triumph over them all, I and Snowdrop as they call her,—yes, triumph, over all, all, ha! ha! ha!!"

The hysteric laugh with which the unfortunate woman concluded, this speech shook her frame almost to dissolution, she vomited blood as from the strokes of a pump, and then fell back again in Tom Starling's arms insensible, and so white and cold that he thought she was dead.

At that moment Dick the waterman came running forwards followed by a couple of men belonging to the public house of which he had spoken.

Tom Starling briefly stated what the poor woman had said, and his fears that she was dead.

"I hope not yet," answered Dick, "but whether or no mate we must get her to the public house, cos of the inquest. Blister me but I'll lay it on to that ere black devil Hamet afore the crowner, I will. I'll get him scragged I will. Poor Crazy Jane, poor soul, we all loved her we did, her and little Snowdrop, there warnt one o' the worst a' the white skinned ones mate, atwixt Wapping Wall and Limehouse, as would have hurt a hair of Crazy Jane's head, there warnt mate, there warnt."

Poor Dick addressed the last words to Tom Starling and blubbered like a child, as he helped to lay the pale and bloodstained form of poor Crazy Jane, on the shutter, which the men from the Anchor and Hope had brought.

It was a melancholy procession to the Rotherhithe publi: house.

Beside the shutter on which her mother was borne walked little Snowdrop, tenderly holding the white cold hand that hung down from that rude bier. At the head and foot marched Tom Starling and the Waterman. Dick was fond of Crazy Jane, and grieved for her fate because he had known her since he was a boy, and Tom Starling in addition to the sympathy which the catastrophe of the poor woman would at any time have awakened in his honest heart, had the additional pain of thinking that the shot was aimed at his life which had taken that of Crazy Jane.

"Well, well!" muttered the honest fellow, "the soldiers say that every bullet has its billet, and so I suppose that them up aloft directed the shot to the heart of this poor woman, and so there's no help for it, but I'll see that the black pirate who ran her down, is run down himself as sure as my name's Tom Starling, that's what I will. And as to taking care of the poor child this little Snowdrop, why Lord love her eyes, she saved my life she did afore her poor mother was struck down on my account, why I should be worse than the men o' war's men say of the jolly-, I should be a fresh water pirate, a land shark, if I did not look after the little one. and take care that her craft is kept clear of the rocks and sand banks, I'll be a brother to her I will;" and Starling, as his quick eye took in the exquisite grace of the tender form just ripening from the child into the girl that walked beside Crazy Jane, instinctively uttered the epithet, and vowed to stand in the relation of a brother to Snowdrop.

Tom was sincere then, and honest, and truly the fatherly relation to a girl who might perhaps have been thirteen or fourteen years of age seemed too grave and reverend for him.

In the interest and excitement of removing the murdered woman from Dick Daring's boat, none of the persons therein concerned had noticed that another boat, having three persons on board, two apparently passengers, had with deep and steady strokes approached the wherry of Dick Daring.

Even as the dying woman was borne away, Dick's boat having been secured to its accustomed moorings, the other boat was grounded, and two persons landed, and having dismissed the waterman followed the steps of the party who had the dying woman in their charge.

These persons were Blustering Bill, and the man whom Crazy Jane had called by the name of Hodson, and who had himself said that his name was Atkins.

A surgeon who had been sent arrived at the Anchor and Hope before the dying woman could be brought there, he looked grave and ordered her to be carried into a ground floor room.

This was the parlour behind the bar, for Mrs. Jenkins the landlady saw at a glance the condition of the patient, she knew that the last moment was at hand, and her motherly heart in a moment sympathised with the sweet child who looked in such an agony of consternation and sorrow upon the livid twitching features of the being who though crazed and poverty stricken, had yet been the only creature to whom her heart might cling.

"Deary me, deary me!" the poor cretur is dying now is she not doctor," whispered Mrs. Jenkins to the medical man.

"She is indeed!" answered the surgeon, who had been made acquainted with the particulars of the catastrophe, "the ball must have traversed the lungs, the poor woman has not many minutes to live."

These fatal words caught the ear of Snowdrop, and with a wild hysterical scream she dropped beside the couch on which her mother had been placed.

"Mother, mother!" exclaimed the poor child, "you will not die, you will not leave me, oh stay mother, stay, or take me with you! oh let me die too!"

The despairing voice of the poor child, whose very soul was riven at the thought of parting with the only blood relation she had ever known, and that the dearest that nature gives, her mother, seemed to recall the fast fleeting spirit of the dying woman, once more she opened those large black eyes, once soft and brilliant as those of the fabled Houri, and still beautiful with the light of maternal love that for ahwlie chased from them even the dull film of death.

"Fear not, fear not my child," she whispered in a husky tone, "I see it all, a noble and true heart will be yours, fear not, all shall in the end be well. But there are trials there are dark clouds, ah me that I cannot tell you what shall be the end. But never fear, never fear, my daughter my darling. Who is it shall triumph over you in the end, no not the false father who cast you forth in his pride, and shall in vain call on you in his despair. Look up my child never fear, your place is among the great ones of the land. You are an heiress, and I am the wedded wife of!——ah no, Hodson, Hodson, what harm have I done you, did you think I would stoop to the man's love when the master was my slave! But you had your revenge Hodson, and a bitter revenge it was! but never mind the time for my revenge will come too! it has come, ha, ha, ha, call the carriage, my daughter is to be presented at court. Bring the set of pearls her father purchased for her!——ah away with them, call you those pearls, deceivers they are only frozen tears, such as I wept when my heart's love grew cold and false, and they are melting all away, 'tis a bitter world my poor child, nothing but tears, nothing but tears."

The last sad words died away in a low wail, and the surgeon who had kept his fingers on the poor woman's pulse pronounced that she was dead.

During that seeming delirium which had preceded her death, the two passengers of the boat which had followed Dick Daring's, had glided into the parlour of the "Anchor and Hope."

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These persons were no other than Blustering Bill, and the man Atkins.

The appearance of Blustering Bill might perhaps have excluded him from the group which was about Crazy Jane in her last moments, but Mr. Atkins wore such indisputable broad cloth, and sported such a splendid watch chain and seals, and wore such a spotless white cravat, and looked altogether so much like a well to do Methodist parson, that the simple barman of the Anchor and Hope had not the heart to deny him admittance to the bar parlour.

Possible the barman thought that Mr Akins wished to administer some spiritual consolation to the dying woman, this, however, was a sad mistake, as the effect upon the sufferer of his appearance was the reverse of consolation.

It was this well dressed sanctified looking gentleman whom she perversely persisted in addressing by the name of Hodson, and whom she appeared to think anything but the saint whom he represented himself, or according to Spurgeonite notions looked.

This mistake no doubt was the result of the poor womans muddled wits.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DUEL IN THE THUNDERSTORM.

The weather, after the Newmarket races, had set in unseasonably warm; the hedge-rows suddenly burst into leaf, the birds were warbling on every bough, and weather-prophets wagged their heads, and sapiently remarked they had never known it so hot at that season, and certainly there would be a thunder-storm.

A thunder-storm there was, not many years since, in the month of January; therefore, a thunder-storm, or the tokens of it, at the end of an unusually warm April, was not, after all, very surprising.

It was the night before the appointed meeting between Sir Miles Cressingham and Herbert Mandeville. The time was six o'clock in the morning, on the morning after the scene at The Cedars; the place a little strip of copse-ground, near St. Oswin's.

The exact day appointed for this hostile meeting was unknown, save to the gentlemen who were engaged in it, and those who were to act as their friends on the occasion; but the scene at The Cedars had so violated not only the calm etiquette of fashionable life, but even the decencies of civilized society, that it was a theme for every servant in the house, and was duly reported to Alice Amery by her waiting-maid. It would have been difficult then to decide whether she or her sister Florence endured the most harrowing anguish.

The slavishness of the spaniel was strongly mixed with the fierceness of the tigress in Alice. She could have torn herself to pieces for the baseness of her love for Sir Miles Cressingham; and yet she loved him still: and, when she learned that a hostile meeting between the baronet and Herbert Mandeville was inevitable, she trembled as much for the man who had won her heart only to trample on and reject it, as her sister Florence did for the honourable and true-hearted young soldier, Herbert Mandeville.

More than once Alice caught herself calculating the chances of Sir Miles against Herbert Mandeville; and remembered, with a sigh, that if Sir Miles was a dead shot, and an accomplished swordsman, so, also, was Herbert. Then, debased as her heart was by her passion, which, under the circumstances was disgraceful, she blushed for herself that she could, even for a second of time, contemplate with a wish the fall of the noble Herbert Mandeville before a man so base and wicked as Sir Miles.

As for Florence, she wept, she prayed, she knelt to her lover, entreating that he would abandon the encounter with Sir Miles. She talked vaguely and wildly of an appeal to his commanding officers. Herbert smiled; for the captain of his own company had agreed to be his second. Those were not days in which a military man would avoid a duel.

Florence was at last somewhat pacified by her lover's assurance that his meeting with Sir Miles was not definitely arranged, as the baronet himself had been compelled to postpone it for a few days.

This was indeed the fact, when Mr. Mitchelson, Sir Miles's friend, waited upon Captain Vivian at St. Oswins, it was to express the Baronet's regret that unexpected business of the most extreme importance would compel him for a few days to defer the meeting with Lieutenant Mandeville.

Captain Vivian accorded the delay somewhat superciliously, reminding Mr. Mitchelson that the disgrace of the affair was ultimately evaded and would all rest upon Sir Miles.

Mr. Mitchelson, one of the fast men of the day, an associate of Sir Miles, and a constant visitor at Lady Fitzwalter's by no means relished the tone of the captain or the style in which that gallant officer surveyed him through his eye glass; he therefore replied very viciously that there was no need to fear any evasion on the part of Sir Miles, and that indeed since swords were the weapons chosen, it would be as well for Lieutenant Mandeville to occupy the intervening time in setting his affairs in order before the meeting, it was not likely he would be much troubled with mundane affairs afterwards.

Captain Vivian dropped his eye glass, which truth to tell, he had used somewhat vexatiously, and his brow gathered with a frown as he sternly replied, that it was not for Sir Miles Cressingham's friend to forecast the result of the meeting, as a mere matter of skill in a fair combat, the odds were likely to be in favor of Herbert Mandeville against any swordsman in Europe, an unfair one, said the captain with an unpleasant stress upon the word could not be in Sir Miles's contemplation, and should not be, when he Captain Vivian acted as the friend of Herbert Mandeville, for Sir Miles and his second too, in that not to be supposed case, would have to answer to him Captain Vivian after they had done with the lieutenant, Mr Mitchelson liked this speech of the captain, who looked very fierce and military over this matter less than the former one, so he muttered some clumsy apology for having underrated the skill of Lieutenant Mandeville, bragged of the honor of his principal and withdrew with more precipitation than dignity.

"What is this fellow, this Sir Miles Cressingham," inquired Captain Vivian when he rejoined Herbert, "I knew his cousin, a famous fellow he added "but I was in Ireland when he died and have never met this man who has been so lucky as to succeed him, the person he has sent to talk to me is a regular cur, and from the cause of your quarrel with Sir Miles I should think him little better!"

Herbert repeated all that he knew of the antecedents of Sir Miles. The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"By Jupiter!" he said, "the fellow is devilish lucky to jump from making up pills and plasters into Cressingham Hall, and twenty thousand a-year."

Eight days after the fray between Sir Miles and Herbert was the date appointed for their meeting.

Florence, seeing her lover every day, was in hopes the duel would not take place at all; Ellinor never for a moment doubted it would.

Ellinor was little less miserable in the prospect of this encounter than her two sisters who loved the combatants.

She knew that even if he wished it, it would be impossible for Herbert to evade the meeting; and she sympathised with him in a mode in which the extreme gentleness of Florence prevented her sharing.

Ellinor was proud and strong-minded. She fully understood the indignation—the bitter hatred—which Mandeville felt towards the baronet; she could well believe that the young soldier was counting the very moments that must elapse before his meeting with this deadly foe: she wished she were a man, that she might chastise Sir Miles herself.

Ellinor persuade Herbert to avoid this meeting! Oh! no—she would fix the hour of it to arrive, save for one consideration, and that was that she had no idea the combat would be an equal one.

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It was not that Ellinor thought that the skill of Herbert as a swordsman, was in any way inferior to that of Sir Miles. She had an uneasy dread of the baronet's science as a chemist; she partook, indeed, in the suspicions of Tim Hawkins, which the poor lad had imparted to her above all the sisters.

Yes, Ellinor believed that the poor mare, Iphigenia, had been poisoned withsome drug which the veterinary surgeons, who opened the animal's body, were not chemists enough to detect.

How easy would it be for such a man as Sir Miles to poison his sword! That was the thought which haunted Ellinor, night and day; which made her so anxious to learn the time and place of meeting; so eager to know which party provided the weapons—whether each would use his own sword.

Tim Hawkins who was Ellinor's faithful ally, shared her fears and named them to Herbert, who laughed at them as he laughed when Tim said the mare was poisoned.

He told the groom that as the weapons must be equal length, it was by no means certain that Sir Miles would have the liberty of fighting with his own sword.

Finally Herbert, who had so often before trusted Tim Hawkins refused to trust him now, and would not let him know any particulars of his engaged encounter with the Baronet.

The morning of the duel rose with a threatening sky. The night had been oppressively hot for the season, dull grey clouds veiled the sun, and though the air was moist and clammy, occasional draughts of wind passed over the level country or piped with a melancholy sound among the trees and shrubs.

Late on the previous night Sir Miles and his second Mitchelson arrived at the solitary inn of a little village or rather hamlet about three miles distant from St Oswins, and not one from the copse in which it had been arranged the duel should take place.

Gracious as were the general manners of Sir Miles, at times they were stern and repulsive, especially towards his associates of inferior rank, or rather his tools. for except with the purpose of making them such, Sir Miles, never freely mingled with persons of lower social statuts than his own.

The Baronet was usually very gracious te Mr Mitchelson, because the latter had been useful to him in twenty mean ways, on this evening before the duel with Herbert Mandeville, the manner of Sir Miles was sullen and harsh even to ferocity. The poor man Mitchelson, could neither do or say anything to please him, so that the patience of that exemplary joint stock was at last worn out, and in reply to a rude answer of Sir Miles which had been accompanied with an oath, Mitchelson said sharply "That it was quite enough to do all the dirty work Sir Miles put upon him, and for which he the aforesaid Sir Miles knew that Mitchelson might some day get a voyage across the herring pond, he was not afraid too much for those risks of which Sir Miles had the lions share of the profit, and kept himself safe happen what would.

But if in return for all that he Mitchelson risked and suffered, Sir Miles could not even keep a civil tongue in his head, he might get some one else than Mitchelson to do his dangerous work, or for that matter do it himself. A worm would turn if it was trodden on it would, and Mitchelson had been used worse than a worm by Sir Miles, for he had not only been trodden but crushed into the earth itself, he would not put up with any more of it, and he would see Sir Miles Cressingham hanged first!"

The conclusion of this harangue was seasoned with an oath from the lips of Mr. Mitchelson, compared to which that of Sir Miles himself was as small beer in comparison with XXX ale.

It would not by any means have suited Sir Miles to have quarrelled with this man, therefore he, though with sufficently ill grace, condescended a lame sort of apology for his previous brutality.

He had got ill news in London, he said; Mitchelson did not know how much care and anxiety he had on his mind.

Mitchelson made no further remark; but much he marvelled as to what manner of business it was which could so much disturb the seemingly impassable Sir Miles Cressingham.

Still greater was the surprise he felt when he discovered Sir Miles did not seek his bed all night. In the little inn where they slept, their chambers were contiguous; and, hour after hour, Mitchelson heard Sir Miles pacing the narrow limits of his apartment.

The day had scarcely broken, when Sir Miles knocked impatiently at Mitchelson's door. The latter at last, from sheer weariness, had dropped into a profound sleep; and, starting up, was surprised to find Sir Miles already dressed, but with those red circles round the eyes, and swollen eyelids, that betoken a fit of intemperance, or a sleepless night.

"Come down—be quick—the coffee is waiting," said Sir Miles, in the same quick sharp tone he had several times used on the preceding evening.

Mitchelson, while he made a hasty toilette, began to wonder whether, after all, Sir Miles was not a physical coward, and was in fear of the rencontre with Herbert Mandeville.

On descending to the little parlour of the inn, Mitchelson found the surgeon of the village taking breakfast with Sir Miles. He introduced the gentleman to Mitchelson.

"We shall have a few scratches," he said, with his accustomed sneer; for Mandeville knows how to handle a rapier. That pragmatical military puppy, Vivian, promised to bring the regimental surgeon with him from London; but I thought it as well, since I found there was a medical gentleman in the neighbourhood, to engage him in case of accidents; and Mr. Hanbury here is so good as to excuse my having called him up, to be in at a death, instead of a birth."

Mr. Hanbury answered with some commonplace civility, hoping there would be no death on the occasion; and the post-chaise which Sir Miles had ordered to carry him and his companions to the appointed spot, and whirl him away when the meeting was over, drew up to the door.

The place at which the duel was to be fought was called the Glade of the Haunted Oak, and consisted of an open space, in a strip of copse ground, on the boundary of a heath, about a mile distant from the village where Sir Miles had slept.

The morning, as before observed, had broken gloomily: hazy clouds rolled over the sky, casting their black shadows on the landscape. A heath is always a somewhat dreary prospect; and, as Mitchelson looked from the chaise upon the bare bleak-looking waste, dotted here and there with a clump of furze, and the threatening sky above, he drew in his head, and wished the morning had been finer.

"It will do," said Sir Miles, drily. "Neither I nor Mandeville will want the sun in our faces."

Presently the carriage stopped at the strip of copse ground. Early as was Sir Miles, he found his antagonist was there before him, as was evidenced by a carriage drawn up before the woodland.

The glade in which the encounter was to take place was a wide open space, at the upper end of which stood a gigantic oak, the growth of centuries, one half of which had been blasted by lightning, which had not struck the trunk, or injured the vital power of the tree; so that while on one side its huge gnarled branches were bare and dry, on the other they were draped in the beautiful fresh green of the spring.

A fearful story was current in the neighbourhood of a murder which had been committed near to this oak, upon a young woman who had stood in the way of a false lover's marriage with a wealthy rival; and, as the body of the victim had been buried beneath the blasted boughs of the oak, of course her perturbed spirit was reported to haunt the spot.

The glade itself was admirably adapted to the fatal purpose for which it had been chosen. Smooth as a lawn, it

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had not a bush or thorn, or the slightest inequality in its surface; and so even was the belt of trees that on all sides surrounded it, that art might have been supposed to have aided Nature in its formation. Herbert and his friends Captain Vivian, and the surgeon of his regiment, the 17th, were assembled beneath the blasted oak.

Not even the form of proposing an accommodation was gone through by the seconds the offence was so gross, so beyond reparation that it was of necessity a combat *a l'outrance* to the death.

Both parties were provided with swords, the weapons chosen.

Ellinor Amery need not have feared that Sir Miles would have recourse to poisoned weapons, he never wrought so clumsily, he was quite content to have Herbert's life at the disposal of his strong and agile wrist, and keen eye.

He even preferred the swords brought by Herbert and Captain Vivian to his own, they were of a better temper. Lower and lower dropped the black threatening clouds, a few drops of rain splashed upon the leaves of the trees, as the swords of the combatants crossed, then nothing was heard but the sharp click or shrill grinding of the weapons, as each accomplished master of fence sought in the other some vulnerable point.

Supremely confidant each in his own skill, Sirl. Miles and Herbert, deadly as was their cause of quarrel were each consummately cool in the commencement of the combat.

This was a condition that could not last, it was no unusual catastrophe in the days of the rapier for friends to commence in perfect amity, a mere trial of skill, and end by ruthlessly slaying each other.

Sir Miles got angry, it was the first time that he had been so nearly matched. He was satisfied however from Herbert's build that the young man had not the amazing muscular strength of wrist which he himself possessed, and he sought to try and wear him out by a sucession of rapid and unexpected feints.

Sir Miles felt this to be his only chance, he could not surprise or defeat the skill of Herbert. whose sword flashed about his antagonists like a writhing glitering snake but he might exhaust his stretngth.

Meanwhile the few drops of rain that fell in the commencement of the encounter, had increased to one of these tropical like showers that are the precursors or accompaniments of a thunderstorm, the hot heavy air lifted, and a wild gust of wind tore through the woods, rending the young green leaves from the branches and scattering the hair from the foreheads of the combatants, but they heard not the howling wind, or the hoarse thunder muttering in the distance, they felt not the drenching rain, they scarce were conscious of the blue forked light that presently flashed over them, in the burning rage and hate that filled their hearts, and nerved their desperate hands, they saw but each other.

Both were now bleeding from slight hurts, a grazed wrist in Herbert. a glance of the sword's point on the shoulder of Sir Miles.

The sting of these insignificant wounds did not abate their hatred, but increased their fury.

The seconds who perceived the flowing blood which the men themselves disregarded, called on them to desist, unheard, their voices were lost in the wild uproar of the now contending elements, and the yet wilder fury of the human foes.

The lightning now glared continuously athwart the glade illumining with terrible radiance the glaring eyes, set teeth, and wild faces of the combatants.

The blaze of the forked flame across the face of Herbert momentarily dazzled him, and with a fell cry of exultant hate Sir Miles seized at the advantage, his sword passed through the young man's shoulder, at the same moment that he was himself disabled by receiving Herbert's weapon in his right arm.

Both combatants staggered back, and both fell to the ground. Sir Miles however glaring wildly at the blasted oak, and exclaiming "what jugglery is this, who, brought that woman here!"

When the surgeons raised up Sir Miles, they were surprised to find him insensible as his wound was merely in the upper part of the right arm.

It was not the wound which had caused Sir Miles to swoon, but a sight that he saw or fancied he saw at the foot of the blasted oak.

A woman pale but beautiful, with her long black hair streaming over her shoulders, and her white garments stained with blood at the bosom, stood at the foot of the tree, and held up her hand with a menacing gesture to Sir Miles.

The figure to him looked horridly real, with its wan features and mournful black eyes, radiant in the blue glare of the lightning, but no human eye save his own beheld that bleeding ghostly form.

CHAPTER XV.

POOR CRAZY JANE—THE VERDICT OF THE CORONER'S JURY—WARRANT FOR THE APPREHENSION OF HAMET—THE ORPHAN'S FRIEND—THE SPIDER, RED REUBEN, AND MR. ATKINS, BLUSTERING BILL'S RESPECTABLE PATRON.

At the inquest on the body of the unfortunate Crazy Jane, a verdict of wilful murder was given against the Lascar Hamet, and a warrant was issued for his apprehension; for, though he had not been seen to fire the fatal shot, the presumption was strong that he was the guilty party, and that the murderous missile was intended for Tom Starling.

Flash Carry was summoned before the coroner, and sharply questioned as to the whereabouts of Hamet.

The woman appeared overwhelmed with grief for the catastrophe of the poor crazed woman, to whom she had been so greatly attached. She swore, most positively, that she had not seen Hamet since the night of the murder, and maintained this assertion, most unflinchingly, during a severe cross-examination.

The circumstance which bore hardest against Hamet was the admission which was wrung both from Flash Carry and old Stedman that they had themselves thought it needful that Tom should avoid the vengeance of Hamet by quitting the public-house through the cellars, as they both mildly termed the hideous underground vaults.

The worthy Mr. Matthew Stedman narrowly escaped coming to great grief through this affair; for the real character of his house partly oozed through the examinations—especially of the sailors, in quest of whom Tom Starling had unfortunately visited the "Jolly Tar."

By dint of an onslaught on his private hoards, however, which almost broke his heart, Mr. Stedman purchased the elequence of a lawyer, who was admirably skilled "to make the worse appear the better reason;" and, according to this gentleman, Matthew Stedman was one of the most kind-hearted, upright, and ill-used persons in the world.

It was not his fault if sailors with a good deal of pay in their pockets and very little wit in their heads, got drunk at his house and lost their money at a game of cards, in which they might or might not have been cheated; that was not the fault of the landlord of "The Jolly Tar," and he was no more accountable for it than for the jealous fury of the man Hamet. The gentlemen of the jury knew the violent and fearful character of the Lascars, and that Mathew Stedman was not singular in the trouble and anxiety which this man, Hamet, had occasioned him, since the whole locality was at times endangered by the insane violence of those wild, half savage people. As to Hamet making his way into the vaults and turning on the water, of the sluice, that, as far as Stedman was concerned, turned out, according to the lawyer, a very innocent piece of business indeed.

The man Hamet knew every nook and corner of the house, as he had been for years in the habit of frequenting it, and the sluice gates had existed long before Stedman's tenancy of the place. So Mr. Stedman got off with a recommendation from the coroner to look more sharply after the character of the persons who were regular frequenters of his house.

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To his no slight annoyance, also, a couple of the Bow Street officers were domiciled there for a week, and made themselves tolerably acquainted with its nooks and corners, though old Stedman rubbed his hands and chuckled in secret that those clever fellows when they quitted "The Jolly Tar," satisfied that Hamet was not in hiding there, had left undiscovered more than one strange hiding hole.

Mr. Atkins and his friend Blustering Bill had discreetly slipped away from the "Anchor and Hope," so soon as Crazy Jane expired, and took very good care not to appear at the inquest, on which, in the midst of so many important details, the crazed woman's fancy that she knew Atkins was not even mentioned.

Poor little Snowdrop was examined. She appeared dressed in a neat black frock with which Flash Carry had supplied her. A few words passed before the jury as to the future destination of this unfortunate child, and the parish authorities of St. George's-in-the-East offered to take her under their charge.

"No no!" said Tom Starling "that shall never be, while I have a shot in the locker. The poor child's mother got the bullet which that skulking pirate meant for me, and though, had he been merciful to the poor crazed soul, she wasn't much account to the poor child, or leastways better than none at all, yet she was her mother and would love the pretty dear, she 'll miss her so, she will. Now begging your honor's pardon for talking of my small matter, perhaps its no offence for me to say that I have an aunt living here at Rotherhithe, a good old soul she is and so is her husband, he's a lighterman he is please your honour, now as I was saying it seems to me that its in some sort through me as it were this poor child has lost her mother, so the long and short of it is, she shant go to the workhouse, if these gentlemen of the parish of St. George's in the East are willing to trust the little maid to Tom Starling, who engages she shall be taken to church and learn to read her Bible, and say her prayers all right, and I assure your honour though I am but a poor mate on board a West Indiamen, my word is my bond, as good as e'er was given by the richest Planter in Jamaiky, if you doubt me gentlemen here is my Captain, as good a sailor gentlemen as any man o' wars man, and he will speak to Tom Starling's character, Captain Horton will, and no humbug, and that's all about it gentlemen."

It was a very great effort for honest Tom to venture on such a display of eloquence before such great gentlemen as in his simplicity he firmly believed the coroner, the lawyers, and the jurymen, and perhaps the parish officers of St. George's in the East.

Captain Horton, a bronzed sailor, who seemed entirely to reciprocate his mates good opinion of him, spoke in the highest terms of Tom's probity and skill in his profession, and messieurs, the officers of the Parish of St. George's in the East were well pleased to get rid of poor little Snowdrop's support, and duly handed her over to Tom, who in addition to charging himself with the future maintenance of the little girl, undertook the expenses of her mother's funeral.

The coroner and jurymen, and indeed every body present, old Stedman included, highly applauded Tom's generosity, and three fourths of them in their hearts thought him a fool.

Tom, on his part, little heeded what any body thought, and so far from esteeming himself a miracle of generosity, he thought that he had barely performed a duty of justice and humanity in saving the poor little girl who had been so instrumental in saving his life, from the horrors of a workhouse.

Though Mr. Atkins had thought proper to keep out of the inquest room, he took care to be informed of the result of the inquiry. For the last fortnight Mr. Atkins had occupied neat lodgings at Stepney, where he passed himself off as a gentleman of small independent property.

Stepney, sixty or seventy years ago, in the time of the regency, was still green and pretty, with a touch of the old time about it, when it was the rural retreat of "Jack ashore," so far back as the times of the Plantagenets, when the famous Sir William Walworth, Lord Mayor of London, had a county house there.

The church of St. Dunstan, at Stepney, is one of the most ancient in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, with quaint carvings about it, and old crumbling tombstones in the churchyard. Above all, in the wall of this old church is a tablet put up, doubtless in ages gone past, by some noble family, whose crest was a fish with a ring in its mouth, and out of this device popular fancy has wrought a pretty story of a damsel of low degree, and a rich lord who wedded her, and a ring which he had given her as a pledge of faith, which ring was lost, and supposed to be given by the lady as the pledge of a dishonest love, when, lo! a fish was brought to table at a feast to which the jealous husband had invited the supposed paramour of his wife, intending to poison them both in one bowl. Then the ring which had been like the handkerchief of Othello, was found in the fish, and the ladys story of having dropped it in the river, was shown to be true, and moreover, her supposed lover turned out to be her brother, devotedly in love with the great lord's sister, who feared that her brother would object at her chosing a swain of the same degree from which he had selected a wife, and so the story ends as those dear old stories do, that the great lord took his true wife of low degree to his heart again, and that the youth so generous and brave, and handsome though he was lowly born, obtained the noble damsel for his bride, *and they all lived happy together for ever after.*

That is ever the end of the old tale, and the old song.

They all lived happy ever after!

There certainly must have been something great and good in those weddings of the old time; since the happy creatures united, "*always lived happy ever after.*"

That we don't *live happy ever after* in these days we do not require the grand event of the late Sir Cresswell Cresswell to show us. The police-office records of black eyes and broken bones too frequently show us in what style of happiness married people of these days live EVER AFTER.

No romamtic speculations, however, either as to the bliss or the misery of the married state, disturbed the mind of Mr. Atkins, as he sat in the best parlour of the "Green Dragon," at Stepney, the day of the inquest on the body of Crazy Jane.

He had appointed Blustering Bill to meet him at this place, rather than at his lodging, in a retired street, near the church, because Mr. Atkins passed there for a very staid respectable gentleman indeed: so much so, that his landlady had informed him that she by no means depended on her lodgings for support, but merely let her first floor because it was not pleasant for a lone widow to occupy a house without any one to protect her or her property.

Mr. Atkins, who had saved a comfortable competence of his own, by no means frowned on these advances of the widow, who was a very plump and comely personage: indeed, he thought he might do much worse than set up his rest in company with the fair widow of Stepney; and, as he was growing somewhat tired of the life which led him into familiar intercourse with such professionals as Blustering Bill, he carefully avoided bringing that gentleman within the cognisance of his landlady.

Mr. Atkinson had ordered dinner and a bottle of wine at the "Green Dragon"—a pleasant old house, within a stone's throw of the church-yard, with a large garden at the back, joining other large gardens, appertaining to houses just as old and quaint. In front of the "Green Dragon" stretched, at that time, a green sward, in the centre of which grew an enormous mulberry tree—a growth of which must have been in old times cultivated in the neighbourhood of Stepney, with much zeal, as the tree of the silk-worm, with its rich and wholesome fruit, was, till very lately, abundant in that neighbourhood.

The "Green Dragon" seldom received a dinner order, save from some mate or captain of a merchantman, who had steered for the locality in search of country quarters, for his wife or sweetheart.

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TOM STARLING ROWING CRAZY JANE AND HER DAUGHTER.

The "Green Dragon," however, kept good porter, ale, and spirits, and good wine into the bargain. A yard was parted from the large garden at the back, and there the good wife kept her pigs and her poultry, so that the most delicate chickens, the most juicy home fed pork, was ready for the table of the dinner guests of the "Green Dragon."

Gooseberry and currant bushes, plum, pear, and apple trees, flourished in the large garden, together with beds of green peas, cauliflowers, asparagus, and flowery potatoes.

Mr. Atkins had enjoyed a very good homely dinner, such as might have been furnished by some country inn a hundred miles from London. There was a boiled chicken and asparagus, a savoury spare-rib of pork, with apple-sauce, and young potatoes, and a gooseberry tart, with custards of excellent quality.

Add to these edibles, strong old ale, brandy, port, and sherry, all of excellent quality, and it will be seen that a guest at the "Green Dragon," ran no danger of death from inanition.

Mr. Atkins had commenced his second bottle of port, the flavour of which he heightened with a choice cigar, a somewhat rare and very expensive luxury in those days.

Mr. Atkins reclined on a couch near the window of the first floor room in which he sat at the "Green Dragon." The rays of the noonday sun glistened cheerily through the leafy screen of the old mulberry tree in front of the inn, on to which was affixed the sign of a sprawling Green Dragon, a monster with a protruding red tongue and monstrous claws, with whose wrath mine host was wont to threaten unruly urchins who ventured in the autumn weather upon appropriating the rich purple fruit which at that season abundantly strewed the grass beneath the tree.

Mr. Atkins looked out upon the green grass and the green trees, and from them he glanced at the grey tower of the old church, and the grey head-stones, and the green graves below, and Mr. Atkins grew religious and philosophical.

"What is life!" he muttered between the whiffs of his

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cigar, "a mere dream of vanity as the parson says, over the folks when they are packed in those nasty ugly boxes of coffins, and let down into the earth. Let me see I am thirty-nine years of age every stroke, though I never own to more than eight and twenty. Nearly forty I am and no mistake at all about it, and scarce a bit have I enjoyed life, always a working and being ordered about at other people's pleasure. Specially the last ten years, with my devil of a master, not but what he pays well he does, and that is all as can reconcile a man to his service, for there's fearsome risks in it and no mistake, he's very wicked he is, and he has corrupted me and made me nigh as bad as hiself. But I dont mean to go on in this fashion by no manner o' means. Nigh forty, why I have lived near half my life, there's few as gets beyond eighty. Its time to live on the square, religious and all that, and go and hear what the parsons says on Sundays. I must have time to repent I must, my master's so selfish he is, he wouldnt care if he led me to get scragged in this world and damned in the next, but I dont see it, I'll just get through this present piece of business and make him pay up handsome for it, and then I'll quit his service.

"I'll live quiet and honest, and wed the widow perhaps, and by jingo it wouldnt be a bad plan to turn Methodist, and be a parson myself. Those chaps make a deal of money showing other folks the way to heaven. I could begin a preaching in the fields and streets, and should soon find some fools to build a chapel for me."

Mr. Atkins knocked the ashes from his cigar, and lapsed into meditations which were presently interrupted by the entrance of his expected visitor, Blustering Bill.

The fellow stumbled into the room with a surly dissatified air, and flinging himself uninvited on a chair, he said in a savage tone, "Well you is in luck guv'ner you is, when folks goes and puts their heads in a mess just to serve your ends as it were, and gets nothing themselves for their trouble, save the chance of a necklace from Jack Ketch. Blister that black fool Hamet, he deserves to be scragged he does, for taking out of a poor devil's hands the best job as ever fell into em. I'd ha' served you true guv'nor I would, I'd ha' got Crazy Jane clean out of your way, and done her no harm neither, I has an objection to blood I has, its ugly, it does'nt wash out. But howsomever the Lascar has clean done your business for you gratis, for nothing, and taken mine out of my hands, and more luck for you, when it were mentioned on the Inquest as Crazy Jane said as she knew a strange gentleman that came in when she was a dying. Paritch hofficers said that were an old cry, she were allways a mistaking of folks in her mad tricks. So now as that's all the news guv'nor, and precious good news I take it is for you, and as for me why I suppose as there is no more chink to be got unless as you happins to have e'er another job on hand, but that would be too much luck for me, I'm that most unluckiest devil I am, I aint a bit better off nor a down right honest cove, blarned if I am!"

Blustering Bill thrust his hands into the empty pockets of his velveteen breeches, and looked as if there would never be any bluster in him again.

Mr. Atkins took another cigar, and offered one to Bill, who turned up his nose at it.

"I don't like them things," he said; "there's no flavour in them. A pipe, and some baccy, now."

"Call for them," said Mr. Atkins, sententiously.

Tobacco and a pipe were supplied to Blustering Bill; then Mr. Atkins offered him a choice of the wine and brandy which was on the table.

The burglar replied by filling a goblet with the potent spirit, which he quaffed as if it had been water.

"My friend," observed Mr. Atkins, eyeing his visitor, "you are, I perceive, somewhat of a desponding disposition, and, I fear, a little disposed to intemperance. Your low spirits are the result of your indulgence in strong spirits: you are out of heart when you are sober. Drunkenness, my dear fellow, is a little frailty in which gentlemen of your profession are apt to indulge; but it is exceedingly imprudent, and often accelerates their chances of a very unpleasant ride, ending at a place called Tyburn. Permit me, also, to assure you that, the very imprudent person, called Hamet the Lascar, has by no means rendered me a service or deprived you of a job. It is no matter of satisfaction to me, that the unfortunate woman called Crazy Jane is dead. In the first place, I agree with you in your dislike of bloodshed—blood is a loathsome thing, it does not, as you discreetly observe, wash out. The death of the woman at this moment is about as inopportune an accident, as could have happened to me, but for you, as it will compel me to call upon your services, for which I will pay liberally, why it is, perhaps more fortunate than otherwise. Now, though it inconveniencies me that the Lascar has murdered the women, I by no means wish that he should be called upon to pay the law's penalty for the crime?"

"Then you is'nt like me, sir," said Blustering Bill, "I always says revenge is sweet, I does, and if as Hamet has anyways circumwented you, why it were easy to turn him over to Jack Ketch, and get paid for one's trouble? There's a reward of one hundred pounds up for Hamet, there is, and I can make a guess, I can, where he is a hiding!"

I will trouble you my friend not to make any guesses at all, upon the subject," said Mr. Atkins, sternly. "As to the Government reward, well money is money, in these days precious scarce, I suppose it always has been so, I never knowed it otherwise. I should like to meet the man from a duke to a day labourer, who thinks he has got money enough, that's what I should, but that's neither here nor there, just now. Understand my friend that I like revenge as well as you do, but it is an expensive entertainment, I have seldom been able to afford it."

"I see, guv'ner!" said Blustering Bill, with a grim smile, "you is one of the lucky ones, generally, you has been better paid to give up revenge than to stand by it. But revenge works a deal like wisdom in this case. I could put my hand on the chap to-night and have him before the beaks to morrow mornin! A hundred pounds for my trouble, into the bargain. A hundred pounds and his revenge too, is not what such a poor devil as I am, pops into every day!"

"I am perfectly aware of the fact," answered Mr. Atkins. "As I told you just now, the rashness of the Lascar has embarrassed me in many ways. In the first instance, I wanted this woman, Crazy Jane, to be alive, and not dead, in the second, her sudden death compels me to employ you to a much greater extent than I at first intended, and in the third, this Government offer for the apprehension of the assassin, compels me to offer a much higher price for your services than I should otherwise have done, or than they are really worth."

"You speaks out, you does, gov'ner," said Blustering Bill.

"Yes, yes," answered Atkins, carelessly. "We are much plainer spoken here, at St. Dunstan's, Stepney, than in the air of St. James's. The poor devils at the east end of the town have their living to get, and no time to spare and throw away in being polite. So I tell you the barefaced truth. The death of this woman called Crazy Jane, is inconvenient to me, but to have the details of her condition and story made public in a trial for murder, would be much more embarrassing, and it is therefore I wish the Lascar to escape. If his apprehension would not occasion any annoyance to me, be assured I would let him be hanged to-morrow."

"But the reward, guv'nor?" reiterated Blustering Bill. "You don't suppose as a cove is agoin' to throw away such a swag as that?"

"By no means," answered Mr. Atkins. "I am not romantic; I look after the main chance myself, and I expect the same from other people. Believe me, I curse the Lascar as heartily as you can do yourself, as through him I must pay you something like double what I should otherwise have offered."

The eyes of Blustering Bill glistened.

"Why you don't mean, guv'nor, as you will double the guverment reward?" he inquired.

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"It is exactly what I do mean!" answered Mr. Atkins.

"Well then, you is doing the grand, and no mistake!" exclaimed Bill vehemently, and striking his huge fist on the table with such force that he set the jugs and bottles dancing.

"I am not generous," returned Mr. Atkins, "I pay for the work I want done, and there will be work for you to do."

Blustering Bill's countenance fell somewhat, but he professed his readiness to work in the required manner.

"Tnis woman—this Crazy Jane," said Atkins, in a more confidential and lower tone of voice, "was not what she seemed!"

"Right you are, guv'nor," returned Bill. "Crazy Jane had been a lady in her time; we all on us thought that."

"Not a lady born and bred," interjected Atkins. "Not a lady who has been kept out of a fortune, but a poor lady who has been a source of trouble to a rich man, who was so foolish as to fancy her pretty face."

Blustering Bill grinned; his wits were keen enough in apprehension of villany. "I see," he said, "poor young lady—pretty and poor—rich man—secret marriage, eh?"

"It is not necessary to state whether marriage was the question," returned Mr. Atkins. "It is sufficient to say the woman was an embarrassment: she was unreasonable. An offer was made that would have ensured her a comfortable support, which she was so absurd as to refuse, and she had the additional absurdity to go mad; but there was cunning in her madness, and she fled from the gentleman's protection, taking with her some papers which it was of the highest importance for him to keep. These papers, I gathered from what the woman said when she was dying, still exist, and she has hidden them somewhere."

"And you wants me to find 'em out," said Bill.

"Precisely so," returned Atkins, "do you think the child knows where they are concealed, or is likely to have them about her."

"Certain not the last gov'nor!" said Bill, "Crazy Jane were very cunning as you says, but little Snowdrop is simple as a lamb, she's just white like the flower they calls her from, and you'll never write black upon her, you won't. Jane know'd this too, mad as she were, I've heard her times and often mumble as she must'nt trust Snowdrop, or she would tell."

"Who is there you think Crazy Jane would trust?" inquired Atkins.

"The Spider's son, Red Reuben as like as not," replied Blustering Bill. Red Reuben is a nidgeot (idiot), he and Jane were allus thick together, the fool and the madwoman. But Red Reuben just worships Snowdrop, and fool as he is, you would'nt cut out of him with steel anything the telling of which would hurt Snowdrop."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Atkins with a sneer, "of what use then to me will be this admirable youths' knowledge of Crazy Jane's secret if he keeps it so safe."

"Well gov'nor," answered Bill, "it is as like as not if Jane had papers or anything else to hide she'd give them to Red Reuben, he'd pop'em away safe enough in some of his queer hiding holes, where he runs when he's afraid of a lathering from his father, the Spider. The Spider would watch the boy if he were paid, and in course you must be at that charge gov'nor, cos I gives up the Gov'ment reward to oblige you."

"Not at all my man," said Mr. Atkins in a very decided tone, "it is yours if you will oblige in getting more money from me than is offered by the government. I shall be willing to pay this man, but I must see him myself, I do not choose to pass the money for him through your hands."

"I does'nt want you to guv'nor, thof I should'nt go for to cheat a pal, but give us a earnest as you means all fair and square to me, and I'll take you down to the Spider's crib to-night," said Bill.

"I will pay you twenty pounds before we set out," replied Atkins, "and as I am perfectly aware what manner of men your associates are, I give you notice that when I leave home, I always place in efficient hands a letter to be opened if I do not return at a certain time, the contents of which would entail unpleasant consequences on you and old Stedman, and to the whole band of thieves and miscreants he is connected with."

"There won't be no danger at all to you gov'nor," answered Bill, adding with a tone as if his sensibility had been deeply wounded, "but you does use hard words to a fellow you does."

"Plain words my friend, plain words, and now tell me when you will take me to see the Spider and his son."

"Well gov'nor, the Spider will be home early to night, cos he has to get ready for a little bit of business we all has a hand in out in the country to-morrow night."

"A bit of burglary I suppose," said Atkins.

"Cracking a crib we calls it sir," answered Bill.

"Dangerous employment very, you run great risks in your profession, Mr. Blustering Bill, but if you think our visit will be agreeable to your friend, I will go to my lodgings and make some little neccesary arrangements, and then be ready to meet you here by the church as soon as you please."

"Well gov'nor its a getting dark now it is, the Spider hangs out near Bethnal Green, and we shall catch him at supper about ten o'clock I guess," answered Bill.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SPIDER AT HOME.—A SUPPER PARTY.—THE HOST AND HIS FAMILY.—THE EXPECTED VISITORS, GENTLEMAN HARRY AND LADY BESS.

In a miserable street on the outskirts of the neighbourhood of Bethnal Green, and in the most wretched part of the locality, was situated the street in which Samuel Jenkins, who, among his associates, was known by the cognomen of the Spider, enjoyed the luxury of a whole house of four rooms to himself.

It was a wretched little tenement at the end of the street, overlooking some marshy, unwholesome fields.

Nevertheless, the neighbours of Mr. Jenkins—the poor weavers who were penned up with their starving families in one room—thought him a prosperous and fortunate person.

Mr. Jenkins's wife had said in the neighbourhood that her husband was a traveller, and so he was, to the houses in town and country which he robbed.

This man had obtained the sobriquet of "Spider," from his cunning, as he contrived and executed burglaries with a craft that ensured success, and had hitherto defied detection.

His conduct to his wretched idiot boy, evinced that he had the cruelty, as well as the craft, of the ugly and rapacious insect.

A cellar below the house near Bethnal Green, was the usual sleeping place of Red Ruoben. There was a stanchion in the wall of the cellar, with a chain by which the poor creature was sometimes secured when he had beene what his father thought, contumacious.

On one occasion, as little Snowdrop intimated to Tom Starling, Red Reuben had been imprisoned for a week in the horrible vaults attached to Matthew Stedman's house in Ratcliffe Highway.

It was about ten o'clock on the night when Blustering Bill and Atkins proposed to visit the Spider, and supper was being got ready by his wife in what they called the parlour of their house.

The spring evening was cold, and there was a blazing fire in the capacious but rusty stove. Coarse abundance, dirt, and disorder, were equally observable in the appointments of the room and the preparations for supper.

A gaudy carpet was spread on the floor, but it was covered with grease spots, and looked as if it had been innocent of the broom for a week. The red cushions of the heavy mahogany chairs were equally dirty, and the table cloth already spread for supper, was covered with stains of gravy, mustard and beer; that it had ever been white was a matter of suspicion, as it was all one hue of dingy brown, save where lighted up by the brighter tracks of the spilled mustard.

The Spider's wife, a melancholy looking litte woman,

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whose sallow dispirited countenance belied the good living which she enjoyed, was very earnest in her preparations for supper, for the Spider was an epicure in his way, and the poor woman trembled if any mischance happened to her cooking: a pair of fat pullets were roasting at the fire, a large leg of pickled pork, greens and potatoes, and a pease pudding were boiling in kettles and saucepans, and a large pie of early gooseberries fetched an hour before from the bakers, was carefully kept warm near the fire.

Mrs. Jenkins had enough on her hands for a good plain cook – the cook of all others whose short comings are the most easily detected. In a corner of the room stood Red Reuben sobbing and crying, beside the fire sat his father lecturing him, as stern as Rhadamanthus.

"It ain't no use talking," said the Spider in conclusion, "you is the most perwerse obstinate monkey as ever a father was plagued with, and unless you agrees to help a cove in his purfession as a son ought to, not a morsel o' wittals passes your lips to night my daisy, so just make up your mind, a bed in the cellar and a good supper of horse whip, or a nice matteras up overhead and a share of the good wittols your mother is cooking, if so be as you is dutiful and makes yourself useful to-morrow night. My eyes, such practice as we will give you of jumping through winders and starting up out of trap doors would fit you for a harlequin at ayther, o' the theayters Royal, Drory Lane, or Common Garden; think o' that lad, why them ere fellows get fifteen and twenty punds a week for making such jolly fools o' theirselves, think if you cou'd come to that out of the practice your father gives you!"

"I does'nt want it," blubbered Red Reuben, wiping his eyes with the tattered sleeve of an old coat of his father's which he wore in lieu of a jacket. "I does'nt want it, I wants a jackass, and a little cart and some greens an' taturs, and I'd know how to sell them tho' I am a fool, and in the summer time I'd have roots 'all a blowin' all a growin'," and poor Reuben unconsciously almost piped out the last words in a chanting tone familiar to the denizens of London and its outskirts in the early summer.

"Why yer owdacious onnateral di-generate warmint, to dare squall out in your father's wery ears the cry o' that ere mean trade as yer wants to take up with. Take that now, blowed if I aint out o' patience."

As the brute spoke he gave the poor lad so violent a box on the ears that he measured his length on the floor.

The wife almost let fall the fowls which she was taking from the fire.

"Oh, Sam!" she exclaimed, "do not beat the poor crittur to-night. You sets me all on a tremble, you does!"

Having spoken thus, the woman stole a terrified glance at her husband, as a blow for herself was not unfrequently the reward of her interference in behalf of her miserable stepson.

Luckily both for her and the boy, the Spider happened to be in a tolerably good humour.

"Don't you flurry yourself, Molly," he said, "I doesn't want any shindy to-night when we expects company, but that ere young wiper would provoke the temper of a stone, he would. A chap of such a build as his, and with a pretty face like a girl what the women would trust, and his silly talk what would keep man, woman, or child from suspecting of he. Oh, you needn't wonder, Molly, as I larrup him now and agin when I think of the fortune the wagabone might be to me, and knows out of perwersity and wickedness to his own father he wont!"

"Don't be angry, Sam," said the woman, "you doesn't forget as the boy was made a silly by that crack on the head he got when you put him in at the winder of a crib you was cracking seven years agone, when he were a little feller of ten years old."

"I remembers it!" answered the Spider, and the feller as made my boy a idgiot too; I flashed the lantern on his face, as I drew my boy back. A swell cove he were; I'd remember him if it was seventy years gone instead of seven. I've never seen him since, tho' I hasn't forgot to look for him, and as sure as hell if we ever meets again I won't forget to make him pay for making Reuben an idgiot!"

In the black, corrupted heart of this wretch, there still lingered a memory, at least, of parental fondness for the poor boy whom he had so cruelly ill-used, but it developed itself in a determination to be revenged on the person who had been the cause of his sad condition, not in tenderness towards the unfortunate creature himself.

There was a time when the Spider had been not only fond, but very proud of his pretty boy, whose red hair, as it was called, would have darkened under combs, oil, and brushes, to a brilliant auburn.

The poor lad's features, which his father had called pretty, had about them a sort of effeminate beauty, the effect of which was heightened by the clear complexion, perfectly colourless from want and ill-usage, and the vacant look of the large light blue eyes.

Red Reuben was not a drivelling, disgusting idiot, for there was no natural defect in the organisation of his brain; it had been injured by the blow of a heavy cudgel on his head as his father put him through the window of a house which he designed to rob.

Poor Reuben was so ill for many months after this assault that even his father could not think of employing him on his burglarious excursions.

But as the boy's bodily health returned, and he settled, as far as his intellect was concerned, into a confirmed but harmless idiot, the Spider and his companions again began to consider how useful Reuben might be, as his little slender form could pass through apertures which would not admit their own muscular frames.

The resumption of this plan was found to be impossible the moment the idiot boy was put at the window of the house which he was required to enter, he fell into screaming convulsions, the burglars were obliged to abandon their project, and the father took the child home, vowing vengeance on the weakness which had been caused by the cruel injury to his brain.

As Red Reuben, grew older and still preserved the slimness of shape and elasticity of limb, so useful to his father in his nefarious mode of life, he was several times compelled to aid in predatory excursions, forced in at a window, to run round and open a house door for his father and his companions.

Poor Reuben was forced into these, for him, acts of daring courage, by blows and starvation for several previous days, and the promise of a treat for himself and perhaps for little Snowdrop too, if he behaved well and made no noise in entering or opening the door of the house which was to be robbed.

It was on one occasion when he had been particularly contumacious, that his father had imprisoned him for a week, in the vaults of old Stedman's house, in Ratcliff Highway.

It was well for Red Reuben that his father's second wife, a poor wretch who had been accustomed to get her living by the sale of water cresses, was a timid and gentle-hearted woman; many a beating had she rescued Reuben from, at the cost of blows for herself, and yet the Spider was not a big muscular man, of whose cruelty a woman would have been thought to stand in fear; he was mean in statue, slightly made, insignificant and ugly in the face, yet when he clenched his small boney fist, and his greenish grey eyes grew almost red with fury, the wife and idiot son would tremble for their lives.

The wretch was not altogether insensible to, or ungrateful for, the kindness of his wife to Reuben, he would have been sorry to have killed the boy, after his fit of rage was over.

This sort of feeling influenced him on the present occasion, for as Reuben scrambled to his feet sobbing, the father poured out a glass of gin from a large case bottle that stood on the table, and offered it to his wife, saying at the same time—

"There, drink this up, Mary, and wish us luck, you're not a bad sort, and that ere varment there, ought to bless his stars he have got you for a step-mother, you're

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saved him from a jolly good hiding this here night as well as many others. Get up you hound, and thank your mother for it, if I lets you have any supper to night, and leave off snivelling."

Thus bidden poor Reuben, dried his eyes with his ragged coat sleeve, and ruefully rubbing his ear, which was turning purple, from the savage blow of his father, he slunk into a chair in the corner of the room, and sat for a minute or two apparently watching his step-mother, then suddenly starting up, he threw his arms round the woman's neck, sobbing out—

"Good mother, good mother, always speaks up for Reuben."

This demonstrative gratitude of Reuben had however nearly been the source of a severe accident, as his step-mother was about to lift one of the boiling saucepans from the fire, and Reuben so nearly threw her off her balance, that the boiling water poured into the fire, sending a cloud of steam and dust out into the room, with the detestable smell of quenched ashes.

The Spider's equanimity vanished in an instant.

"Od rot yer, yer blundering whelp," he exclaimed, aiming another blow at the boy which his wife intercepted, and making light of the matter, though her hand was scalded with the steam, she hastily cried out.

"Don't be angry Sam, don't be angry, there's no harm done, I've took up the fowls, so there is nothing afore fire but the plates what I can wash."

The Spider muttered some further threats againstth e boy, and then glancing at the Dutch clock in the corner of the room, which was close on the stroke of ten, and the smoking leg of pork which his wife had taken from the kettle, his indignation changed its object from the boy to his expected guests.

"I say Molly," he said, "its nigh ten o'clock, and I told that ere flash cove Harry that we should have supper at half arter nine, and he's not come yet. I shan't wait more nor ten minutes. I won't have my wittals spoiled for he. Who's he, indeed, to go about sticking himself up for a nob. A sneaking beggarly cadger, for all he goes so fine, when he's not dressed professional."

"Well," replied the docile Molly, "Gentleman Harry's a sneaking trade that's for certain, but then yer knows Sam dear its a wery safe one, he wouldn't come to no great harm if he were found out."

"No Molly, that's why he is such a sneak," answered the Spider, "he goes about a cadging in all sorts of disguises and gets a deal o' money, and has'nt got to pay no toll to that ere divil's limb old Nat Stedman, and then if he's cotched he's just brought afore the beak, and gets off with a week at the mill, perhaps palavers the wery beak hisself and gets five bob out o' the poor box. No sailing the herringpond, no scragging for he, and yet year in and year out, I bet he gets more money nor I and Blustering Bill both together."

"I don't know about that, Sam!" answered the woman. "You and Bill sometimes gets good hauls, you counts guineas on one day's earnings, as many, perhaps, as Gentleman Harry gets pence. And then, you know, if he don't get an hempen necklace or a sail on the herring pond, its more nor likely his flash blowen, Lady Bess, will."

"And much Gentleman Harry will care for that, so long as the gal hands over the dibbs to him. She's a bold gal that, I admires her, I does."

"She's a trapesing, trolloping, brazen minx!" said Mrs. Jenkins, somewhat angrily, and mixing the mustard so violently that she broke the cup she was making it in.

"There you go!" growled the Spider. "I knows what you thinks about Lady Bess—but I don't want to quarrel with you, Molly."

"Oh, no more do I with you, Sam," returned Mrs. Jenkins, with a toss of the head that was somewhat aggressive, "but I doesn't like Lady Bess, that's flat."

"And I doesn't like Harry—that's flat again," answered the Spider. "I'm blowed if I aint disgusted with the name he's got. He's called Gentleman Harry just cos of his fine duds and his stuck up airs; why it's a name for some dashing highwayman, not a cadging, pitiful sneak, such as he."

"There he is then," said Mrs. Jenkins, as a smart rap at the door was heard.

The Spider gulped down his choler, rushed to the door, and, as his wife began placing the supper on the table, ushered into the room Gentleman Harry, and his fair companion, Lady Bess.

As these two persons, however, who were both young and good-looking, claimed so eminent a position among their associates as to be called Gentleman Harry, and Lady Bess, we must not introduce so important a pair so scurvily as briefly to describe them at the end of a chapter.

CHAPTER XVII.

GENTLEMAN HARRY AND LADY BESS.—THE SUPPER.—THE CAROUSE.—UNEXPECTED VISITORS.—THE CONFERENCE.

GENTLEMAN HARRY, as he appeared that evening on his visit to the Spider, was a good-looking young man, about twenty-five years of age, very smartly attired in a scarlet coat trimmed with silver lace, a purple satin vest also trimmed with silver lace, buckskin breeches, and top boots. His hair was nicely powdered, and he took off his hat to Mrs. Jenkins with an air that might have become an exquisite entering a ball room. Gentleman Harry carried a silver-headed cane, and the cambric handkerchief he drew from his breast pocket was redolent of perfume.

In company with him was an exceedingly pretty and elegant looking girl—a coquettish sort of beauty, with sparkling black eyes, ebon ringlets, and *nez retroussé*.

This girl was smartly attired in the prevailing fashion, in a handsome dress of dark blue silk, a scarlet capuchin, and a blue velvet hat with a long white feather.

In the early part of her career, this girl had been waiting maid to an earl's daughter, and so imposing among her present associates appeared the airs and graces she assumed, that she had obtained the cognomen of "Lady Bess," of which she was as proud as though the title had been her appanage from birth.

Lady Bess was an impudent, captivating, little shrew, with a turned up nose, a clear brown complexion, a cheek like the rosy side of a ripe apple, a pair of black eyes, and a set of teeth as white as pearls.

We once heard, that in a certain locality of London, where money is considered to "make the man," that the gentry who could keep a full carriage, and pair would not visit those who could only afford a horse and chaise.

"Proud man's fantastic tricks," the absurdity of social pride begins with the Emperor and ends with the beggars in the streets, some of whom, "heaven save the mark," actually hold their heads above the others.

So it was with the Spider and his guests, Gentleman Harry and Lady Bess. The guests held that they greatly honoured with their company the persons whom they condescended to visit, and the host and hostess humbly acknowledged the distinction, and did their best to entertain such distinguished visitors, as a citizen might do when a lord deigns to eat the excellent dinner he has been at an enormous expense in providing.

Both Gentleman Harry and Lady Bess, who were fastidious in their habits, were not a little nettled at the slovenly manner in which the meal was served, but it was abundant and well cooked, and they had their purposes to serve in visiting the Spider and his wife, as the nobleman generally has, when he condescends to visit the citizen.

The boy Reuben was permitted to share in the feast at the solicitation of Lady Bess, and when he had devoured his meal hastily and in fear, for the poor creature knew that upon the slightest caprice he would become the victim of his father's brutal temper, he stole out of the parlour and crept up stairs to sleep on a mattrass on the floor of the little back room he was permitted to occupy when so far in the good graces of his father that he was not driven to the cellar below.

Wild and furious grew the carouse with the Spider and his guests, the sprightly Lady Bess, drinking gin punch and porter with the freedom of a seasoned toper; and jesting with the Spider, who favoured her throughout the supper, with the most impudent oglings.

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These proceedings excited a great deal of jealous wrath in Mrs. Jenkin's and an equal amount of amusement in Gentleman Harry, who secure in his own good looks, and the attachment, vicious as it was of Lady Bess, was diverted at the mingled impudence and conceit, of the Spider, who with his naturally hideous face furthermore disfigured by a black eye and a cut on the cheek bone, received in the fray with the sailors at the "Jolly Tar," dared in the presence of his poor plain broken down wife, make love to a young, dashing, and very pretty woman.

Mrs. Jenkins did not take the matter so philosophically, and Gentleman Harry perceived as she removed the supper things that she handled them nervously, and looked at her husband as though more than half inclined to throw a dish or a knife at his head.

Lady Bess, perfectly reckless, continued "fooling" the Spider "to the top of his bent," she laughed immoderately at the lackadaisical love, sick expression of his eyes, small and sharp as those of a ferret, she suffered him to take her little plump white hand, and squeeze it in his bony and not over clean one, and first winking at Harry she whispered to the Spider, "that it was very unfortunate they were both so fettered with a wife and a fancy man already, as otherwise she should have been proud to be loved by a fellow with so much pluck."

Poor wretch, she little knew how dear the mirth of that hour would cost her in the time to come, from the brute passion which she had awakened in the man, and the jealousy of the down-trodden woman.

Gentleman Harry was not jealous, but he knew the character of the Spider better than Lady Bess, and he had a wholesome suspicion of the meaning of the frown that was gathering on the countenance of his wife; he knew how the woman was beaten and illused, and he also knew that the worm sometimes will turn on the foot that crushes it.

So Gentleman Harry mixed another steaming goblet of punch, and gallantly invited Mrs. Jenkins to partake of it, and then nudging Lady Bess under the table, he addressed himself to the Spider.

"You see Spider," he said, "I am sure that I and Bess are much obliged by the generous way in which you treat us, specially Bess, that you seem so took with."

"Why you aint such a fool as to be jealous is you Harry," said the Spider with leer, "you'd let a fellow take one kiss from them plump beautiful rosy lips of Lady Bess, and not be wery angry would yer."

"Oh not in the least," answered gentleman Harry, "only I should pay you out, by kissing Mrs. Jenkins."

"Kissing of Mrs. Jenkins," roared the Spider brutally, "Ha, ha, ha, I gives you joy of that my friend, to get a kiss from her lips in exchange from those of Lady Bess, would be like changing a rale goolden guinea just for a battered old farden."

"Ah, you old married fellows always forgets to be polite to your wives. But a joke's a joke mate, and we've had enough of it, you know as the rale matter as brought me and Lady Bess here, is business, and business must be attended to."

As Gentleman Harry spoke thus he discreetly put his arm round Mrs. Jenkins and drew her down into her seat, for she had turned towards Lady Bess with such unmistakeable rage in her looks, that Harry feared she might bring her nails in contact with the fair face of her rival.

"Yes, yes," said Lady Bess, dexterously slipping out of the Spider's grasp, as she had as little indignation for the approach to her own of his dirty repulsive countenance as for the talons of his wife."

"Yes, yes, my man Harry is right, keep off Spider, a joke's a joke, and we come here principal to talk as he says about business. There you just go and sit to'ther side of the table by your own wife, and I'll keep here by my Harry, and then I'll tell you of the dashingest job as ever fell in the way of a clever cracksman."

The impudent ogles with which the Spider had been regarding Lady Bess, changed to a scowl of hatred, but avarice in the man's heart, was the supreme of all his vile passions, and he endeavoured to assume an air of unconcern as he drew his chair further away.

"Yes, yes, you is quite right Lady Bess, business afore all things, but you should make a little allowance for a fellow, my piece of sugar candy, and consider a cove forgets himself a little when he sees a ripe beautiful peach before him, when all he has is withered old crab apples."

A crash of glass against the wall of the apartment followed this sally of the Spider, who had been accustomed so long to abuse, beat, and tyrannize over his wife, that he would as soon have thought to see a lamb fight with the butcher, as for her to dare turn against him.

Luckily for himself, and unluckily for society which would have been well released of him on any terms, the Spider ducked his head as his inraged wife hurled at him the heavy old fashioned goblet filled with steaming punch, which in her fury she snatched from the table, and which would certainly have split his skull.

"Take that you false cruel perjuring willian," screamed the infuriated woman. "The last feather breaks the horse's back it does, I've put up with your beating and staring me I have, and of your going along of that Slashing Jane and Flash Carry, and half-a-dozen other jades what you meets down at old Stedman's. But don't you go for to think as I am such a poor mean spirited crittar that I'll have your hussies brought under my nose, specially such a tawdry stuck up, fol de rol miss as that ere Bess."

Half of this tirade would have put the match to the touchwood of Lady Bess's temper, and starting up quite forgetful of her dignity, she reached across the table and shrieked at the top of her lungs, which by the way were strong ones—

"Me tawdry, me fol de rol, the ugly dirty old trull. Let me get at her, I'll scratch her eyes out I will."

"Sit down Bess, and don't be a fool," said Harry, holding back his enraged inamorata.

The Spider on his part had suffered his wife to shriek out her long pent up wrath in sheer astonishment, but as Harry held in his strong hand the raving Lady Bess, the Spider coolly took from a corner a huge thick stick, and holding it threateningly over his wife's head bade her sit down.

"I won't, I won't" cried the woman, "I won't put up with you no longer."

For answer to this the heavy stick descended on the wretched woman's shoulders, and the shriek of agony she uttered, with a loud imperious knocking at the door.

"Silence yer jade," cried the brute, clutching the woman by the hair and throat.

"That ere's some flash cove on business with me as knocks so loud. Do yer think as I'll have my business spoiled by your tantrums? Open the door, Harry—will yer?—while I settles this lady. What next, I wonder!—she to dare turn agin her lawful wedded husband!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

TAMING A REFRACTORY WIFE—THE NEW VISITORS TO THE SPIDER—THE CONFERENCE—THE UNSUSPECTED LISTENER.

With a grasp of his right hand on her throat, by which the poor wretch was well nigh strangled, with his left firmly clenched in her hair, which misery had made prematurely grey, the Spider dragged his wife down into the cellar where he was in the habit of imprisoning Red Reuben.

"When yer knows how to behave to your husband, and keep yer saucy tongue within your teeth, and begs my parding, and likewise Lady Bess's, I'll let you out this here nice little sleeping-room. And, now mind, if so be as you dares squall out, or gives me an' my friends, which are all nobly ones, any more trouble this night, why, I'll come down here and give you such a welting as yer never had in all your born days."

With these agreeable and humane assurances, the Spider thrust his wife into the cellar, hurling her with such violence on the ground that the poor woman was for the time rendered quite incapable of giving him further offence, as her head struck against the wall, and she lay stunned and motionless.

The Spider bolted his wife in the cellar, and then returned to the upper chamber, where he found Blustering

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Bill and Mr. Atkins, who, in his absence, had been admitted by Gentleman Harry.

Bill introduced the stranger as the gentleman-cove, what he had had business with about Crazy Jane.

Gentleman Harry had but just ushered these two persons into the parlour as the Spider returned. Blustering Bill looked ill-pleased at the presence of the Spider's guests.

"It's a matter of business I wisits you on, Spider," he said; "and not out of a spree: and I does not consider Gentleman Harry as one of the family,"

"Faith, my dear fellow," said Harry, lolling back in his chair and sipping his punch, "your's is a family into which I have no wish to intrude myself; for, though of a cheerful disposition, I have no mind to die dancing, as most of your connections do, and that upon a tight rope."

"I don't want any of your mean insiniwations," answered Blustering Bill: "my purfession is more honourabler nor yours, at any rate."

"I likes not these here grinning honours!" as the poet says," ejaculated Gentleman Harry, who was a frequent visitor of the theatres, and fond of interlarding his conversating with scraps of plays.

"If yer dares go for to grin at me," said Bill, who was not poetical, and did not understand quotations, "I shall be after making you grin at the wrong side of your mouth. And now, you Spider, I've just got this here to say to you. You knows as you and I have been pals for a long time, but if so be you comes cheek by jowl of Gentlemen Harry, don't go for to think I'll share that friendship with yer. He's too flash, he's too flymy, by half. You doesn't think as I'd let my friend, wot is a rale gentleman and no mistake, tell the story of what he wants of you, afore such a lying, sneaking, prewaricatin' humbug as Harry, wot I expects some day will blow us all afore the beaks?"

"Hards words breaks no bones, Blustering Bill," said Harry. "We expects no better from a hog nor a grunt. You'll come to grief yet, Bill, along of your low ways. But I doesn't wish to put my finger into other people's pies, or spoil business for the Spider, so I and my lady are quite agreeable to take a walk, or go and get a glass at the Grapes, at the corner of the street, whilst yer gets through yer business."

"No, no," said the Spider. "One friend's as good as another, any day of the week!" then he added with an oath, his resolve that Harry and Lady Bess should not stir, at the same time offering to take the new comers into a room up stairs, a proposition which was agreed to.

When the man Jenkins had left the room, Gentleman Harry proceeded to make himself comfortable, according to the parting injunctions of his host. He stirred the fire into a brighter blaze, and mixed another goblet of spirits and water.

Lady Bess, on the other hand, who from the moment of Atkins's entrance had sat with her head leaning on her hand, and her face kept in the shade, still maintained the quiet thoughtful attitude which was so little usual with her.

Gentleman Harry, little used to such a mood in her who was in general wilder and gayer even than himself, inquired tenderly what ailed her, for between these two lost and guilty creatures existed an honest and passionate affection—the one redeeming point in their perverted natures.

Lady Bess removed her hands from her face, her eyes were full of tears, yet through those tears the black orbs flashed with a fierce vindictive fire.

She rose up, and approaching her paramour, placed one hand upon his shoulder, while with the other she pointed upwards, as to the apartment where the Spider was conferring with his newly arrived guests.

"Harry!" exclaimed the woman in a low, but fierce and hissing accent, while her peachy cheek grew pale, and her black eyes glared at him, now tearless but threatening.

"Harry that man, the man who came in with Bill, the swell cove the gentleman," and Bess laid bitter stress upon the last word, "the gentleman, the fiend of ingratitude, and cruelty I told you of. He would have sent me to the gallows Harry, he would have hanged me, he would have hanged me. Oh God, for the crime, the frenzy he had driven me into. That was long years ago, and I thought he was dead, but the words he spoke burnt like fire into my brain, His looks withered my heart. I thought he was dead; but since he lives shall I not be revenged!"

The young man started to his feet, there was nothing in his manner now of the careless insolence which had so much angered Blustering Bill, his slight frame was drawn up and rigid, and seemed far above its natural height; his nostrils dilated, his eyes glared, he would have encountered the brawny Bill, or half a dozen other herculean ruffians at that moment, if the woman had bidden him.

"The time has come then," he exclaimed, in that same hissing serpent tone which Bess had used. "The time has come, I will show you that I love you? Bess my darling, a bullet from this pistol shall lodge in the villian's brain, though there were twenty ruffians instead of two."

As Gentleman Harry spoke he drew a small but exquisitly wrought pistol from his bosom.

"No," exclaimed the woman, "a bullet in his brain, were too poor a punishment for my revenge, since he lives I will have a long vengeance, I will dog his footsteps night and day, I will whisper in his ear words that shall make his heart grow cold to-night. Hark! they come!" continued Bess, as she heard the Spider and his companions descending the stairs. "Leave me to my own vengeance, Harry, I will execute it well, never fear. I will watch this villain to his home if I walk the streets all night."

The Spider paused again on the stairs to receive some further instructions from Atkins, and in that brief space Bess arranged with her paramour what excuse he was to make to the Spider for her departure; then they both stole quietly from the parlour, and Harry softly opened the house door, and she glided out into the darkness of the night.

Five minutes afterwards Blustering Bill and his employer, Atkins, quitted the house discussing the chances as to whether the papers respecting little Snowdrop, which Atkins was so desirous to obtain, had really been placed by Crazy Jane in possession of Red Reuben.

"And supposing the boy does hold them," said Atkins, "is it not probable that with the cunning and obstinacy of an idiot, he will refuse to let his father know where they are concealed."

"Never fear guv'nor," returned Bill with a brutal laugh, "Spider has a fashion of cutting the truth out of Reuben with a horsewhip."

Mr. Atkins had no objection to the cruelty of the process, so long as he got the papers, he would not have cared if Reuben's flesh had been stript from the bones so as he got possession of the important papers, for which he intended to demand from his master a price that would make him what he called comfortable for the rest of his days.

So the two men went on their way exulting in the prospect of successful villany, unknowing that there was an avenger, a very Nemesis at their heels. A slight female figure, very little, threatening in its appearance, that laid wait for them in the shadow of deep portals, that glided noiselessly after them through the dark streets, stern as fate, inexorable as death, an incarnation of hatred and revenge, wary as the fox, and fast and fierce as the bloodhound, who would know no pause, no rest, and yet could wait and watch to run down the prey with unpitying and vindictive wrath.

The man Atkins parted with Blustering Bill, who bent his steps towards the hovel in the miserable looking alley which he called his home, and Atkins with a lightened heart pursued his way to his comfortable lodging at Stepney.

He had drawn his latch key from his pocket, but perceiving by the lights in the parlor that his landlady was sitting up for him, he indulged in a low chuckle.

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"All right," he said, "all right, my buxom young widow, fate is propitious, here is nothing to do as the old Scotch song says—

"But draw in your chair and sit down,
And sport with the widow my laddie."

Mr. Atkins stuck his hat more jauntily on the side of his head, and was just raising his hand to knock at the door, when a light touch felt on his shoulder, a female voice whispered a few words in his ear, and the hale strong man reeled back from the door step, and fell senseless on the pavement as though he had been shot.

CHAPTER XIX.

FLASH CARRY AT HOME.—THE PARTING WITH SNOWDROP.

It was the evening of the day on which poor Crazy Jane had been laid in the quiet house, the rest of which is never disturbed.

Flash Carry sat lazily sewing in the comfortable apartments, in a small street off the Commercial-road, with which the Lascar had provided her.

Little Snowdrop, worn out with the sorrow and excitement of the last weeks, lay fast asleep on a chintz covered and comfortably cushioned settee.

The needle of Caroline Andrews passed quickly through the seams and hems of the garment she was making, an additional black frock for Little Snowdrop, but occasionally she brushsd her hand across her eyes, for the tears gathered in them, and fell thick and heavily upon the black bombazine she was making up. She had not seen the violent Hamet since the night when in mistake for that of Tom Starling he took the life of Crazy Jane.

Caroline was more truly unhappy than she had perhaps ever been in the course of her troubled life.

Her heart was very sore for the untimely death of poor Jane, and though she had never for a moment felt anything like an emotion of love for the fierce dark Oriental, yet there was a kindly feeling mixed with her indifference, for in spite of her lost condition, Caroline had a good and grateful heart; and the gratitude she felt towards Hamet for having rescued her from the horrors of want, had been the source of those kindly feelings, under the influence she pitied rather than condemned the man for the atrocious deed he had committed, for was not even his guilt the result of his love for her. Thus Caroline got very sad on Hamet's account, she knew not where he was in hiding, but she knew that if the reward offered should tempt any of his associates to betray him, that the gallows would be his doom for the shallow pretext of insanity was not in those days permitted to rescue a murderer.

The thought of such a termination to the career of a man whose blind love for herself had been the cause of his crime was very terrible to Carry.

Beyond this, with the recklessness of such women as herself, Caroline had squandered the funds with which Hamet had provided her, and she shuddered at the thought of a renewed struggle with poverty, for poor Carry was not, it must be admitted, a Magdalen, she had no thought of doing penance for her sins, of returning to to the paths of rectitude, and fighting for honest bread with a world which would deal hardly with her, and never forget or forgive her faults.

Poor Carry, she was no saint in embryo, in whom the most exalted virtue was to spring out of vice.

She was a pretty, idle, and luxurious, and frail woman, who loathed hard work, and had no intention of undertaking it.

Yet, though Flash Carry had not the slightest intention of abandoning her dreadful mode of life, she was just so far redeemed from utter depravity, as to be sensible of the loveliness of innocence in little Snowdrop.

The most rigid divine, the chastest and most pure of maids and matrons, could not have felt a thrill of holier horror, at the thought of stain and ruin to that gentle child, than did the lost and abandoned Caroline Andrews.

The parish authorities of St. George's-in-the-East, had offered again to take Snowdrop under their care, and aware of the flaw or rather fracture in poor Carry's character, had demurred strongly to letting the child remain under her charge.

Poor Carry wept bitterly at this; she had never felt her own degraded state in its real horror, till she was told that she was not to be troubled with Snowdrop; and one of the overseers jeered brutally in a sort of Bumble fashion, because the poor woman said she would bring the child up decently and send her to school.

"Send her to school!" said the fellow. "Devil doubt you, my lass—a school as shall teach her such ways as your own. You wants to make a market of the gal, I expects, 'cos as how she is very pretty, and will bring a tidy penny into your purse by and bye, when it runs low, and you are not quite so handsome as you are now."

Poor Carry vehemently denied this—denied it less in anger at the vile charge against herself, than in fear and sorrow that she would be deprived of her little Snowdrop, and that she would be taken to the workhouse, and, after a few months hard living, be sent out to earn her bread in some new service, that would expose her to those temptations under which Caroline had herself succumbed.

She therefore wept, entreated, and promised the overseer that Snowdrop should come to no harm with her; but the man still roughly refused to let the child remain with her, and the issue of the dispute between them was doubtful, when Tom Starling, accompanied by a buxom motherly-looking woman, made his appearance.

Tom introduced this person as his aunt, the wife of a lighterman, a respectable well-to-do person, who had no children of her own, and who was quite willing, at Tom's request, to take charge of the little girl; Tom paying all expenses for her board and clothes, and her being sent to school.

"For you see sir!" said Tom to the overseer, "I feel like as if I were bound to look after this piccaninny, since the poor mother got the bullet in her breast that black nigger designed for me. Now I've overhauled the log book, and looked into the locker, and I find there's a fair charge o' round shot, shiners I mean, to take in cargo for the present and trade on in the time to come. So as I have no little sister or cousins, and my aunt has no children, and is willing to steer this tight little craft into the safe harbour of virtue and good conduct, I act as owner of the little vessel, you see, and find the needful for lading and fitting, and setting the sails, and my aunt here will be the skipper, a tight hand, but one as knows her duty, and knows all the shoals, and rocks, and soundings, and will make the ship answer well to her helm, and keep her out of the shoals of bad conduct."

This offer of poor Tom was so freely made, and his aunt made herself known as such a highly respectable matron, that the parish authorities very gladly surrendered little Snowdrop to their charge.

Mrs. Barton, Tom's aunt, will be well described by the common phrase, "a good sort of woman."

That is to say, she was sober, industrious, and chaste; her natural inclinations were good, and she had never been tempted out of them by poverty, or by the snare of her own personal attractions; for though not an ugly woman, Mrs. Barton had not the slightest pretensions to be called a pretty one.

Her house was always the model of neatness, and so was her attire, this last never showy but of excellent materials.

Mrs. Barton kept one servant and a good plain table, and as there was abundance to eat and no children, it might have been thought that this one servant would have a very comfortable life.

This, however, was far from being the case, Mrs. Barton was one of those very good people who can be charged with no fault, not even with a bad temper, and yet she was an intensely disagreeable person to live with.

She was never in a bad temper, and at the same time, might have been said to be never in a good one.

She had indeed been a little sorrowed by never having been a mother, for childless marriage is even a sadder condition to a woman than celibacy.

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DEATH OF CRAZY JANE.

Under this, as she considered it, most serious affliction, Mrs. Barton had sought consolation in an over dose of religion, and this had not contributed to sweeten her temper, as the religion of the sour puritanical sort.

Mrs. Barton would not go to church, she did not like them ere stuck up church parsons she said.

She therefore joined the congregation of an independent minister, one Jeremiah Graball, who had gained great popularity by denouncing the rich for eternal damnation, in his new Bethel chapel every Sabbath, thereby winning from the pockets of the poor, an income that provided him with a handsome house at Bow, a horse and chaise to ride backwards and forwards to his chapel in the Mile-end-road, and silk gowns for his wife and daughters, to such an extent that had not his followers been most intensely gulled, they would have began to consider that they had themselves made their minister out of that wealthy class whom he himself so severely sentenced to damnation.

Poor Mr. Barton himself, a jolly careless fellow, had pished and fretted a good deal at the annoyance of his wife's religion, at the toll which was established on his purse, and frequent presence of Mr. Graball at his homely supper-table, spoiling the meal, as he said, by his long grace and psalm singing afterwards.

Mrs. Barton informed her husband that he ought to feel proud of these visits of the minister, but the ungod y and perverse man felt no pride in the subject, and at last flatly declared that either the grace must be shortened, and the psalm omitted altogether, or he must tell the reverend gentleman to his face, that he did not want his company.

This source of quarrel, the only one which had ever subsisted between Mrs. Barton and her husband, was not thoroughly known to Tom Starling; for his aunt was really very fond of him, and merrier in his company than any other, and her husband who was also very fond of Tom, had positively forbidden Mr. Graball's visits during

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the young man's stay, saying with truth that the lad should be let to enjoy himself when home a month or two from a long voyage, and not to set with the doldrums by the homilies of Jeremiah Graball.

In the company, then, of her nephew, Mrs. Barton managed to dispense with that of the minister; and, as she executed all the snarling at the servant when she was about with her, Tom thought his aunt one of the most amiable of women, as she was really one of the most honest—for her puritanism was very sincere.

The defect was not an uncommon one with very worthy people—that of making sobriety, chastity, and even cleanliness, very disagreeable.

She would frown at her husband taking an extra glass of grog; at a kiss under the misletoe, at Christmas; at a grain of dust on her polished mahogany tables, or a speck of grease on her Kidderminster carpets, which she wanted to preserve with a look of spick and span new.

This was the woman who offered to become a mother to little Snowdrop—always with the provision that Tom should defray the expense of that onerous relationship.

Tom had heard enough about Mr. Graball to suspect that his aunt was a little severe about matters of religion and morality: but then he argued that in governing such a beautiful little craft as Snowdrop, the skipper must indeed keep a sharp look-out; "and so," said the brave fellow, "if aunt Barton does make the little one go to chapel morning and evening, and have her read an extra chapter of the bible, it won't do her any harm—it will only help to make her a good girl."

It may well be imagined with what a look of horror this virtuous lady regarded Flash Carry.

She actually drew aside her own rich silk dress, because it swept against the hem of Carry's flounces.

Tom, who noticed the action, was a good deal surprised, and somewhat shocked by it. Caroline herself was neither one nor the other.

She knew well with what rigid airs virtue finds it necessary to attest itself in the well-kept wives whose whims, as well as wants, are provided by their husbands. She did not even show or feel any resentment at the manner of Mrs. Barton; she was used to such contemptuous insolence, as the eels are used to skinning.

She was honestly glad that Mrs. Barton had agreed to aid her nephew in removing little Snowdrop out of her own wretched sphere; though she could have wished that the lady had been kinder—more merciful in her manner—towards herself; and this not because on this occasion she felt the violence with which she was treated more acutely than usual, but because she thought her dear Snowdrop would have had a happier home with a kinder woman.

Caroline Andrews was perfectly aware that little Snowdrop's chances in life would be much better cared for under Tom Starling's superintendence than her own.

She could not, however, bear the thought of not seeing Snowdrop again.

She had taken the child home to her lodgings after the inquest; for though, on that occasion, it had been decided that the little girl should be given over to Tom Starling's charge, there were preliminaries to settle with the parish officers—above all with the doughty overseer, who had not been present at the inquest.

Beyond this, too, Tom had to make arrangements with his aunt, who was not quite the good and simple woman that poor Tom took her for.

Yes, it gave Caroline a sore, an excruciating heartache to think that she was to be forbidden in future the sight of her dear little Snowdrop.

So when, two days after the inquest, Tom brought his aunt, Mrs. Barton, down to the overseer, and, under warranty of the Poor-law Guardians, she agreed to take charge of little Snowdrop, Carry ventured submissively to ask if she might be sometimes permitted to see the child.

It may be imagined how this request excited the virtuous indignation of Mrs. Barton.

All the worst part of her nature was aroused by the presumption of such a creature as Flash Carry presuming to speak to her, though she stood at a very humble distance, and employed a very humble tone.

'Let you come and see the child!" she replied, in a very irate tone. "Let the likes of you cross my threshold—you lost abandoned creature—while it is mainly to keep the child out of the company of such as you, and to save her precious soul, that I have consented to take charge of her!"

Flash Carry's temper which was none of the mildest, rose at the brutality of these taunts. She was about to favour Mrs. Barton with some of the eloquence in which she excelled, when little Snowdrop softly took hold of her hand, and looking up, with her eyes filled with tears, whispered:

"Never mind, Carry, dear; don't be angry. I'll stay with you, who have always been good to me. I won't go with this lady if she will not let me see you."

Flash Carry looked down at the beautiful uplifted face of the child, and swallowed the wrath that almost choked her; for she was conscious that Mrs. Barton had only expressed the truth in an unfeeling manner, and that if Snowdrop was to be saved from her fate she must not continue to be her associate.

But she could not keep back her own tears as she told Snowdrop that they must part.

The distress of Carry made Tom's heart ache. The more honourable and upright a man may be, the more intensely he pities such poor forlorn lost creatures as she was.

He whispered apart to his aunt; and finally that lady so far compromised the dignity of her virtue as to allow the child to remain a day or two longer under the charge of Caroline, while the latter finished making the garments which she had purchased for Snowdrop.

But now, as Carry stirred the fire into a brighter laze on that chill spring evening, and looked at the innocent face of Snowdrop, her thoughts grew too bitter for endurance, and, sinking her head upon the table, she wept bitterly.

The sound of coach wheels, and a loud knock at the house door, roused Caroline from her fit of tears, and Snowdrop from her peaceful slumber.

"He has come to fetch her away," said Carry, wiping away her tears. "What a fool I am to cry about what I am glad of!"

On opening the door, Carry found that her suspicions were correct. The visitor was Tom Starling, who had brought a hackney-coach to take Sowdrop to his aunt's house at Limehouse.

Caroline invited the young sailor into the little parlour. She took some cake and a bottle of wine from a closet, and begged he would drink to better fortunes for little Snowdrop. Then she showed him a box which she had packed neatly with the clothes she had bought for her, at the top of which she had laid the black frock which she had just finished.

Tom had wanted to pay for this outfit of the little girl; but Carry had begged so earnestly to be allowed to make these last presents to her darling, that good-natured Tom had let her have her own way.

Poor Snowdrop burst into tears when Tom entered. She was not ungrateful for his kindness, and she was conscious of its amount; but she little liked parting with her old friend Carry, in favour of new ones.

In one of the many interviews which Carry had had with Tom since the death of Crazy Jane, she had made known to him her reasons for thinking that the poor creature had originally occupied a superior station of life, and her suspicions that Snowdrop really had some title to the mansion in the country, from the doors of which she and her mother had been so savagely driven.

She told him, also, that she had engaged old Stedman to discover, if possible, the locality of this house, and the character of its owner.

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Tom shook his head as the sanguine young woman spoke of the hope she had of restoring Snowdrop to that position in life from which she had probably sprung. He justly thought that the foes who had driven the mother on madness and starvation would be little likely to make reparation to the child.

"But it doesn't signify much, Miss Carry," said Tom, in conclusion, "whether the father of the dear little lass repents of his wickedness or not. A regular lubber he must have been to have abandoned the poor mother; and such downright pirates seldom steer for the harbour of repentance. Once a man runs up the black flag, he generally fights under it to the end."

"You think, then, that once bad is always bad," said Carry, sadly.

"Not by no manner of means, my lass," answered Tom, struck by the girl's sorrowful tone. "The best of us run upon the sand-banks of error in our voyage; but it is the plotting pirates, who run down honest craft, that are as bad in the end as at the beginning."

"Then," returned Carry, raising her blue eyes to the face of the young sailor with so imploring a look that Tom afterwards owned that he felt as mean as a purser dealing out five-water grog—"then you do not think I am all bad?"

"Shivers my timbers if I do!" answered Tom, pressing the plump white hand which Carry offered him, perhaps, a little more warmly than was necessary. "No, no! my girl; you may have run a bit out of your course; but, when your log-book is overhauled up aloft, I warrant your goodness to this little craft, and her poor crazy mother, will stand out in such large bright letters that not much else of the account will be reckoned."

"Then, then," said Flash Carry, with more of confusion in her manner than she had ever shown in the course of her life, "then if you do not think me so very bad, perhaps you will kindly let me hear sometimes from my dear little Snowdrop."

"Lord love your eyes, I will bring her to see you every week while I am in port," answered Tom, "and I'll warrant before I am off on my next trip, I will bring my old aunt round to let you see her too; she's a good soul, that old woman, though a bit strict. She's got hold of a Methody parson, and goes for a little too much in the psalm singing and Bible palaver, but she's a good soul in the main, and will make Snowdrop as right as a trivet if she has the bringing of her up. But as for denying for you to see the lass now and then would be a whole ship's load of ingratitude, as ugly a lading as a craft can have aboard."

In spite of these assurances of Tom, poor Carry would not restrain her tears, when Snowdrop was attired for her departure in a little warm cloak and black straw hat, threw her arms round her neck and in a voice broken by sobs, implored to stay with her.

Tom's heart was so thoroughly melted that he would perhaps have left the little girl under Carry's guardianship, but the young woman herself had more firmness, and in her true and honest love for the child, she removed her clinging arms, she told Tom he had better take her away at once, she would not trust herself with another kiss, as Tom lifted the sobbing child into the coach, but choked down her tears, and tried to look cheerful till the coach drove off, and than hastily shutting the house door she returned to her little parlour, and throwing herself on the settee wept as bitterly as the child herself had done.

The evening had now quite closed in, but Caroline did not get candles, but after the paroxysm of her tears was past, sat by the fire light musing sadly, hazarding a painful conjecture as to what her lot might have been had she earlier met such a man as Tom Starling.

Then she fell to wondering whether under other circumstances he would have loved her.

For the first time in her life, Caroline was diffident as to the power of her charms, she felt instinctively that Tom Starling did not love her, that the emotion which made her heart throb so painfully joined no response in his.

The frank free kindness of the young sailor was just that of a friend, of one who pitied her, and Caroline did not feel that in her case at any rate "pity was akin to love."

She felt that Tom's pity must necessarily be allied to contempt, that however generous, however merciful and kind, he must despise, still at heart, such a lost abandoned creature as herself.

Oh! pitiable indeed is the condition of the unhappy woman, who, sunk in the abyss of ruin, has a heart which suddenly wakens to the influence of a pure and honourable love, then she learns to know herself, to shrink from her own shame, to estimate the value of the virtue she has lost, to loathe herself as unworthy of that love from which she is excluded, like Dives from the joys of Paradise.

The bitterness of her vain remorse, like the pang of a fiery serpent gnawing at her heart, dried up the tears of Caroline Andrews.

There is a period in every woman's life, when her dream is to be a happy wife and mother; she may wear through a long existence of celibacy, she may become like Caroline, a lost and fallen creature, she may of her own free will assume the sable veil of the nun, and vow herself to the cold cloister, but there was still a time more or less evanescent when her soul breathed forth hopes bright and fleeting as the rainbow's tints, when her heart ached with its longing for those joys of bitter-sweetness which the wife and mother only knows.

As she sat listening, watching the flames leap and flicker in the stove, and cast fantastic shadows over her little chamber, the thoughts of Caroline Andrews reverted to the long, long ago, when all a maiden's genial fantasies were hers.

Then reviewing her own lost condition, her mind reverted to that of little Snowdrop, she at least would be rescued from contamination, she might enter that state of innocent love, which Caroline's own hand had for ever closed against her, with that last thought rose a natural envy that made her heart sorer than all else, and for a moment she felt with the horrible women to a companionship with whom she had sunk, and as she remembered Slashing Fan's brutal words, "why should that ere child be better than we?" she did not revolt from them with her accustomed loathing.

At this moment came a low tapping at the window.

There was a little garden before the house, which was tenanted by an old widow, who had been fain to shut her eyes to Carry's moral shortcomings, in consideration not only of her quiet habits, but of kindness shown to herself when she was helpless and sick.

It had been a practice of the Lascar Hamet, to give such a summons at the window as that which now thrilled the heart of his paramour.

In the very anguish the envy that had stung her in her cruel reverie, there had been a savour of better feelings, she had seemed to herself less depraved in that she would even feel such pain, but those slight strokes upon the window pane called her suddenly back to all the baseness the destitution of her misery.

She remembered that she was the mistress of a Lascar, a demi-savage, and as she rose to answer the summons, she remembered also, the gibes of a laundress whom she had once employed, and who had taunted her with the disgrace of having a black lover.

Hamet was not black, but he passed for such with the woman whom Caroline had offended.

The young woman sickened at the sound of that slight tapping at the window. It was a signal which Hamet was accustomed to give when returning late at night from the evil haunts in which he carried on that nefarious trade, that had enabled him to clothe his mistress in silks, and adorn her with jewels.

Caroline actually felt sick as the familiar sound fell upon her ear. She sunk back in her chair, trembling; and did not notice the summons till it was repeated sharply and impatiently.

She knew that Hamet had evaded the search for him

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by a voluntary imprisonment in some one of the hiding holes at the "Jolly Tar"—the secret of which the officers of justice had been unable to penetrate.

The terror with which she had always, to a certain degree, regarded her fierce lover, had reached its climax since his barbarous murder of Crazy Jane. Caroline was incapable of herself betraying the man to the officers; but she regarded him now with such unutterable fear and loathing, that she felt anything but satisfaction at his escape.

The summons at the window was repeated a third time ere she could summon courage to open the door.

When she did so, the Malay, habited in European garments, and muffled in a large cloak, stole into the house with the stealthy cat-like tread that was at all times peculiar to him.

Caroline followed him into the parlour, and closed the door softly.

The fear and dislike which she had felt towards the man even in his absence, accumulated when he actually stood before her, stained with the blood of the innocent wanderer whom she had befriended.

She dropped upon a chair, and shaded her eyes with her hand, as if she would have shut out the dark visage of Hamet.

The Malay's features worked convulsively. He perceived that he was an object of horror to the woman whom he loved with the frenzied ardour of an Eastern nature. He dropped the mantle, the loose folds of which had disguised his slender figure, and, throwing himself at the young woman's feet, he tore down the hand that hid her face. He grasped both her hands with a force that would not be resisted.

"Look at me—look at me, Caroline—my life, my soul, my love, my all the world!" cried the unhappy wretch, in a tone of such sharp anguish as pierced the woman's heart the more that she was conscious how not only his crime, but the remembrance of Tom Starling made him more than ever odious to her.

"Caroline," pleaded the Malay, "I love you—I love you! Though you be false, I love you still; though you spurn poor Hamet, still he loves you! He loves you as the tiger loves his mate; he would die for you, Caroline! If the blood of the poor Yengeese woman is on Hamet's hand, it was shed by him out of love for you. Look at me, Caroline; for four long days no meat or drink have passed my lips; for Sahib Stedman dare not bring me food—the men of the law watched him so close: and now even they may be at my heels. Look at me, Caroline—look at me; speak to me, if but a single word!"

The voice of the wretched man was choked with sobs, his hot tears fell on Caroline's hands as he alternately pressed them to his heart and lips.

It was impossible but that the woman for whose sake he was suffering so acutely should feel some pity for him.

"Oh Hamet, why did you come here?" said the young woman, "why, oh why, were you so wicked, so cruel as to kill poor Crazy Jane?"

"I did not mean to kill her," groaned the man, "I would no more have hurt her than the antelope would tear its young. I meant that bullet for the sailor, for the man you love. Ah, Caroline, I will be like a dog to you, I will crawl at your feet, however much you spurn me, but for the sailor your Yengeese lover, I would kill him, and like a dog I would lap his blood."

"The sailor was not my lover," said Caroline fiercely, her blue eyes sparkling and her cheeks flushed with anger, "I never saw the man till he saved me from the stroke of your dagger."

"But you have seen him since," urged Hamet, "yes, you have seen him more, many times. Oh Caroline, I hate that man, and I love you, I trust you have pity on me and love me back but a little, he may love you, but who can love you like Hamet."

As the miserable wretch spoke, he cast himself on the floor, tearing his hair, and beating his breast in the extremity of his anguish. Flash Carry was accustomed to that paroxysm on the part of her wild lover, and sh dealt with him as lunatics are dealt with.

She spoke to him with firmness, she commanded him to rise, and not disturb her with his madness, she spoke gibingly of his jealousy of Tom Starling.

"It needs but for you to be as dull as you are cruel,' she said, "that you should be jealous of this young Englishman, be jealous of your own countrymen, be jealous of the Spider, or Blustering Bill, or any other of the wretches who herd at the Jolly Tar, but do not be jealous of that young sailor, for be assured that he is too noble, too good, to love a wretch so vile as I am, a woman who has sunk as low as to be your mistress. No, no, Tom Starling looks down on me too much to love me."

"Ah, what you say," exclaimed Hamet, his fury changing its object, "that sailor, a poor man, look down on you, the great Rajahs of my country or the great lords of the Yengeese they all might love my Caroline, my pearl, my beauty. Oh Caroline, I will kill him, I will see him dead, dead, who dares despise you.

Caroline had sunk back in a sullen mood, averting her eyes from the swarth countenance of Hamet, and gazing vacantly at the fire, when the melancholy cry of the watchman, as he paced along the street chanting, "past one o'clock, and a cloudy morning," smote her ears.

"Hamet," she said sharply, "get up, you cannot stay here, whatever may be my feelings towards you, I have no mind that you should come to the gallows, least of all that you should be seized in this house, you know of course there is a reward offered for you, and if for the sake of the poor old woman, my landlady, does not betray it is certain that the neighbours will. Have done with this madness then, and go back to old Stedman's, it is there only you are safe."

The Malay who had been crouching on the ground in the manner of the Orientals, rose and looking wistfully at Caroline, replied—

"Oh, then Carry would not like poor Hamet to be hanged, well suppose he go back to old Stedman, give him some wine first, drink a glass of wine with poor Hamet, then he will go."

The wine of which Tom Starling had partaken still stood on the table, and the young woman took fresh glasses from the sideboard, but as she resumed her seat she did not perceive that in one of the glasses the Lascar as he filled them dextrously dropped a minute portion of some greyish powder.

"Drink, drink to Hamet, poor Hamet who loves you Carry," said the Malay.

Caroline Andrews took the glass which the man offered, and drank the wine it contained somewhat eagerly, for she was in that mood in which stimulants are sometimes taken to drown thoughts.

But she had scarce swallowed the potion, and stretched out her hand to replace the glass upon the table, when her fingers relaxed, the brittle vessel fell scattered to the ground, her eyes closed, her head dropped on the back of her chair, she shivered, stretched out her limbs, and then lay to all appearance dead. The Lascar set down his own untasted wine, a smile of demoniacal triumph curled his lip, his eye glittered like that of the rattle-snake, when prepared to strike, he shook his clenched hand in the face of the insensible woman from which all colour had departed.

"Oh," hissed the vengeful Oriental between his clenched teeth, "you make fool of Hamet, oh, false woman, how I love you, how I hate you, you shall live for my love, you shall suffer for my hate, how fair she is, Lotus face, I could kiss thee into death. Sleep, sleep, when thou wakest it will be to live only for Hamet, that he may adore thee in his love, that he may torture you in his hate."

The Oriental glided softly from the room, cautiously and noiselessly he opened the house door, and thrice clapped his hands.

Four dark figures then rose up as if from the solid earth, out of the shadows that overhung the street, they stole swiftly at the summons of their master.

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One of these men, Hamet stationed as sentry at the door, they were all of the same light elastic build as himself, for they were Malays, and his countrymen.

Having posted that one man at the door, Hamet beckoned the others to follow him into the parlour, then the insensible woman was wrapped in the large mantle which Hamet had thrown off, and borne motionless as a corpse from the house.

A light cart with a tilt over it drove up from the corner of the street, in this cart the young woman was placed, and followed by Hamet.

An hour afterwards a barge laden with timber was slowly proceeding down the river.

The barge was the joint property of old Stedman and Hamet, the cargo, a ruse to blind still further the blinded eyes of justice.

In the cabin of this barge lay Caroline Andrews, still insensible, beside her sat the Malay Hamet. The man, like many of his race, had no mean knowledge of medicine, and at first he anxiously applied his fingers to the young woman's wrist, where the pulse fluttered so faintly, that scarce could he determine whether it beat at all.

Then he drew a tiny vial from his vest, and carefully poured a few drops of its contents into a glass of water, which immediately became of a rich ruby colour, and diffused a delightful fragrance throughout the cabin.

Hamet bathed the face and hands of the young woman with this liquid. With a teaspoon he forced a small portion of it down her throat. Then, with a deep sigh, Caroline unclosed her eyes, and gazed with a half-conscious air round the low-roofed cabin, with the dingy oil-lamp swinging from the centre beam.

Caroline feebly passed her hand across her brow, as if trying to recollect herself; but her faculties were still confused by the potent drug which Hamet had administered to her. The hand fell listlessly by her side, her head turned upon the pillow that was placed beneath it, and she slept calmly and peacefully, with the rosy hues of health and beauty gradually stealing back to her fine complexion.

With unclosing unwearied eyes her strange lover still sat beside her. Occasionally he smoothed or propped the pillows, or arranged the bed-clothes in the narrow berth; or, as he sat with his dark glittering eyes fastened on the face of the woman, a vindictive and triumphant smile would play around his lips. Otherwise, he might have been a statue, for aught of life or life's emotions he displayed. That darkest hour that precedes the dawning had passed away; faint streaks of crimson dappled the eastern sky; and still, like some inert monster, the black barge crept slowly, sluggishly, down the broad river.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DISABLED DUELLISTS—PLOTTING ON A SICK BED—SIR MILES AND HIS MAN BURRELL.

The wound received by Sir Miles Cressingham in the encounter with Herbert Mandeville was not dangerous—merely promising to deprive him for a few weeks of the use of his right arm. That which the baronet had inflicted on Herbert was severe, for the muscles were lacerated, and for some hours the surgeons feared the result would be lock-jaw.

Strange to relate, the inferior injury had the worst results; and Herbert was already progressing to recovery, while Sir Miles was confined to bed by a raging fever.

The wound in his arm became so inflamed that his medical attendant feared at one time that amputation would be necessary.

The most hideous phantasies possessed Sir Miles during this illness. He raved of strange scenes that must have passed in his youth—of his dead cousin, whom he had succeeded in his baronetcy—of his dead wife; but more than all of a pale bleeding woman, with a child in her hand, who stood, he said, by his bedside, night and day, and plied his ears with dismal lamentations.

At the end of a fortnight, though the fever had past, Sir Miles remained so ill as to be unable to leave his bed.

Throughout his illness, whenever the delirium left him, he had enquired, with savage eagerness, as to the condition of his opponent. He launched into the most terrific maledictions when he found that Herbert was not dead, and swore that, if he kept his own life, he would yet take that of Herbert Mandeville.

The surgeon, who had called to see Sir Miles, overheard this threat; and, disgusted with the man's ferocity, he told him sharply that there would be little chance of his executing it if he indulged in such insane fits of fury; and that, on his part, he would not answer for his life, or continue to attend a patient whose intemperate disposition would defeat the skill of the whole College of Surgeons.

Sir Miles knew very well that the surgeon did not exaggerate his danger; for he had himself, it will be remembered, been a student of medicine. So, with some difficulty, he curbed his temper, lest it should disappoint the gratification of his revenge.

The baronet was slowly progressing towards convalescence, when a confidential servant, who had been absent some time, employed on one of those secret missions, of which his tortuous proceedings required so many, suddenly made his appearance at the hotel at Newmarket to which Sir Miles had been carried on the morning of the duel, and from which his severe illness had made it impossible that he should be removed. Sir Miles, who was propped up with pillows, endeavouring, but with little appetite, to swallow some chicken broth, looked up eagerly as the servant stole softly into the room, and opening the curtains at the foot of the bed, expressed his regret at finding his master so ill.

The face of Sir Miles, which, during his illness, had faded to the hue of yellowish chalk, became crimsoned at the sight of this man; his sunken eyes sparkled with eagerness; and calling to the nurse he bade her take away the tray and leave the room.

The woman, who was neither a drunkard nor a sloven, but a respectable person, the widow of a small tradesman, whose reduced circumstances had compelled her to the painful and laborious calling of nursing the sick, ventured to expostulate, and beg that Sir Miles would not put away the nourishment which he so much required, and to remind him that the doctor had forbidden all excitement.

With a frightful oath Sir Miles dashed the tray on the ground, and ordered his man, whom he called Burrell, to turn the nurse out of the room.

The poor woman stooped to pick up the tray and the fragments of the porcelain breakfast cup that had contained the broth, but Sir Miles shouted at her like a maniac, and swore if she did not instantly quit the apartment he would thrust her out himself, and the nurse perceiving that he was likely to execute this threat, made a precipitate exit, leaving the shattered porcelain on the floor.

She made up her mind, however, that she would decline further attendance on so obstropolous a patient, who, as she truly said to the head waiter of the hotel, was fitter to be managed by a keeper from a private madhouse than a respectable female nurse.

"Don't anger yourself, sir, don't be angry!" said the man Burrell in a fawning, oily kind of accent, and creeping on tiptoe to the side of the bed as the nurse fled from the room. "It's a bad thing—a very bad thing—for a fine hale gentleman like you to be laid up here like a sick girl, when there's a deal of business wants your attention and can't be transacted by any one else by no manner of means whatsoever. But don't be angry, sir, don't be angry; you'll be well soon it is to be hoped, and if as you aint, why what can't be cured must be endured, patience is the key of content, and time and tide wait for no man."

"Curse on your infernal maxims!" roared Sir Miles. "Give me all the news at once, or I'll knock your brains out, or wring your neck, or do something else that is desperate!"

"And stupid into the bargain, if you please, sir Miles,"

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answered Burrell, coolly, 'for if you knocked out my brains, or twisted my neck, you not only would lose some news that I bring you now, but, I say it with all due respect and humility, Sir Miles, one of the truest and most useful servants that a gentleman in your circumstances could possibly possess."

"Give me a glass of that lemonade," said the baronet, pointing to some on a table by the bedside, "your self praise makes me sick and thirsty."

"More likely, sir, the foolish, misbecoming passion you put yourself into; if you want to get well, you should keep yourself quiet. I tell you, sir, as the most humble and devoted friend which a poor servant can be to his master, that you ought to be up and about, and not lying sick a bed, just at this present time, for in course I have been keeping my eyes open, and have looked after your interests on other matters than that on which I have been kept away so long"

"Long," yes muttered Sir Miles, "you have been away more than three weeks, confound you, why did you not send the address of whatever hole you have been harbouring in, it was anxiety to know what you were about that brought on the fever, I should have been well in two days if I could have had you by my side."

"As to holes, Sir Miles," answered the man with an air of offended dignity, "I begs most respectfully to say that I never lives in no holes, I have been a boarding in the house of a respectable widder lady, what lives almost intirely on her fortune, leastways only lets lodgings cos she feels lonely like."

"I wish the widow and her lodgings were in ——," exclaimed Sir Miles in a fury, and it was not heaven that he proposed for the poor woman's dwelling. "I suppose," he continued, "you have been making a fool of yourself, dingling about this woman who is so badly in want of another husband, that she will put up with such a fellow as you and neglecting my business."

"Nobody could have attended to your business better, Sir Miles," answered Burrell, "I'm sure, sir, you must not complain, I not only a most risks my blessed neck in the hands of Jack Ketch, but I runs the chance of a knife at my throat, or a bludgeon on my skull, along of going among all sorts o' thieves and murdering ruffins to do you service."

"True, true, Burrell," answered Sir Miles, "I admit you are a faithful fellow and very useful, but do not brag or provoke me just now, the people say I am mad, I think I am, I think it is enough to make me chained to this infernal bed, ever since the day when I met that accursed Mandeville, whose life I will yet. Ha, ha, ha, I will drink his heart's blood, I will."

"And a nasty unnatural drink too sir," interposed Burrell, "I have no objection whatever to your aythers shooting Mr. Mandeville, or running him through, but as to drinking of his blood, I should'nt advice you to nothin of the sort. You'd a deal better drink a glass of good wine after you have killed the lieutenant, and another glass of this lemonade now, for you are feverish, you are Sir Miles, and wants cooling."

Sir Miles groaned. "Well, well man, your news, your news," he said impatiently, a grave almost solemn look stole over the features of the man Burrell as he replied—

"Luck is not all again you, Sir Miles, though you have been laid up a bit. One of your great troubles is over, one plague is done with, she is dead, Sir Miles, poor creature, she is dead."

Sir Miles looked eagerly at the man, as he stood beside his bed curiously playing with the fringe of the counterpane.

"This is no news to me Burrell," he said, "I knew it."

"You know it sir," answered Burrell, starting, and with an accent of astonishment, "why Lord a mercy sir, they never sure let you read the papers, and you so ill, why you know all about the Amery people then."

"I have not been permitted to see the paper, Burrell," returned Sir Mills, "and it was to learn what is passing with the Amery's that I was so anxious to see you, and yet I know she is dead, she died before my meeting with Mandeville."

"She did indeed, sir," answered Burrell, "but in the name of heaven how came you to know it."

"I don't know whether the information came from heaven or the other place," replied Sir Miles with a grim smile. "It depends upon which she has fixed upon for her place of abode. I do not think she is in Paradise; for she would scarce be so great a fool to quit such a comfortable lodging as that is reported to be, to plague me with her company, night and day. There she is, Burrell, standing beside you!"

The face of Burrell became as livid as that of the sick man, and, shrinking back, he exclaimed:

"Lord love you, Sir Miles!—what an 'orrid notion. But, in course, sir, you only was jesting; you was always fond of rough jokes, Sir Miles."

As the man spoke, he wiped the cold dews of perspiration from his brow, and resumed his place beside Sir Miles.

"I do not jest, Burrell," answered the baronet, solemnly. "I tell you she stands beside me night and day. Her disembodied spirit wears the aspect of her mortal frame. I saw her first on the morning of the duel—created, living or dead, to be my bane. She presented herself before me at the moment when the life of Herbert Mandeville was at my mercy. She presented herself before me at that moment, beautiful as ever, but ghastly pale, and with blood streaming from a wound upon her breast. Anger and grief were in her face, and she held up her hand to me with a threatening gesture. Curses on the weakness of my nerves!—my wrist, for the moment, lost its power; the point of my rapier swerved, and passed through the shoulder of Herbert Mandeville, instead of piercing his heart. I have always derided all tales of ghosts and spectres; I have believed, with men of science, that the eyes sometimes deceive us—that we are the victims of optical illusion: but this bleeding ghastly form so persistently pursues me, that I know not what to think. If the tales of priests be true, may that grieving spirit suffer for all eternity the tortures which the fiends inflict, for coming with its ghastly aspect between me and my just revenge!"

The man Burrell shuddered.

"Oh! Sir Miles," he exclaimed, "do not say such dreadful things: sir, please don't! It's all a fancy, sir; there's nothing here worse nor ourselves. I can't see nothing, sir."

The man glared fearfully round the chamber. Anything worse than his master or himself he could not have seen, even though the blood-stained spectre of the baronet's diseased mind had appeared to him; but Burrell saw nothing but the material objects around him, and the ghastly visage of his master: so he tried to persuade him that he was mistaken.

"She never leaves me," said Sir Miles. "She has moved from your side now, and is standing at the foot of the bed. I can see her between the curtains."

"Oh! Lord, sir, don't; please, don't talk so!" said Burrell.

"Did I not tell you I knew she was dead?" pursued Sir Miles. "I have not seen the papers: how then should I have known she was gone, if she had not come herself to tell me so?"

"Perhaps, sir," said Burrell, "it may have been mentioned by somebody when you was very ill, and they thought you warn't noticing; 'cause there has been a good deal about it, and a warrant out for the chap what killed her."

"I hope the fellow will not be hanged for doing me such good service," said Sir Miles.

"No fear of that, sir," answered Burrell. "He has got clean off. I gave the same money as government offered, to a chap I employ, who was after giving him up."

"Right, quite right Burrell, you serve me well." answered Sir Miles, "for three times a hundred pound I would not have had that man brought to trial. But the papers Burrell, the papers, have you secured them."

"Unluckily, sir," answered Burrell, "you know Sir Miles, that woman were always as cunning as a hunted

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fox, and it seems this cunning stuck to her in her madness, for what but cunning would have brought her down to the hall, she were sly enough to know her way there sir, aye, and to remember the old place when she saw it. It was the most unluckiest chance that brought her there."

"I think not," interposed Sir Miles, "but for that freak we should not have known she was still in existence, and she might have made her appearance at some time or place far more dangerous to me, she might have met and recognized one or other of us, she had good cause Burrell to remember us both."

"Bad cause I think you mean sir," answered Burrell, with a chuckle, "but for the nature o' that sir, she did remember me, and called me by the old name, which I have put by because I was tired of it."

"She remembered you Burrell, when, where, in what place, what company," demanded Sir Miles in an accent of alarm.

"Make yourself easy, Sir Miles, it war'nt nowhere of consequence that she met me, only just among them cutthroats I were telling you of, and when it were mentioned at the inquest that she had told some strange gentleman that he was an old friend, the Parish officers who were there laughed, and said that was an old trick of her, remembering folks what had never seen her in all their lives."

"And the child," inquired Sir Miles anxiously.

"She is took away by a young sailor chap, along of whom her mother was shot, as the bullet was meant for the sailor, you make your life happy about her governor, she won't be no trouble to you."

"Not after I have those papers which her accursed mother stole," said Sir Miles, "but if they fall into the hands of any person who can read, and has wit enough to place them in the hands of a lawyer, I am ruined."

"'Twould be a bad case governor, for certain," answered Burrell, "but not ruined I think, you could pretend to do the honest and honorable and all that, and give up the portion."

"And reduce myself to beggary, and worse, worse than that," exclaimed Sir Miles.

"Well, to my mind, nothing can be worse than beggary," returned Burrell, "but perhaps," he added with a cunning look, "there may be some little matter of business in those papers, worse than you have told me of."

The yellow white of Sir Miles's complexion grew dusky red at this remark of his partner in villany, but he replied with a sneer, "you are such an unconscionable scoundrel Burrell, and so secret in your worst knaveries, that you must needs assume other people are like yourself, and are false even with their most trusted agents. Those papers contain simply what I told you, but quite enough to make me willing to give five or six hundred pounds to the person who can place them in my hands."

Burrell's eyes glistened. "Make it a thousand, Sir Miles," he said, "and I will bring you those papers or forfeit my life in the search for them."

"You know then where they are concealed? Perhaps you have them now in your possession?" said the baronet.

"Indeed, Sir Miles, I have not got them," answered the man, "nor do I know exactly where they are. The poor mad lady gave them to an idiot boy to take care of."

Sir Miles laughed bitterly.

"A proper guardian for an important trust," he said. "why what is more likely than that such a creature would destroy the documents altogether?"

"Not a bit of it, Sir Miles," returned Burrell, "the lad is more cunning nor a fox, and more obstinate nor a mule. His father, that I offered to pay well if he could find where the lad had hid the papers, has been trying this week past to cut the truth out of him with a horsewhip, but it aint no good; if his flesh were taken in strips off his bones, he would not give up what he promised to take care of for Snowdrop, for he is rare fond of her, he is!"

"Snowdrop?" exclaimed the baronet, with a look of inquiry.

"That's what the thieves, and wild women, and cutthroats that I have told you of, call the little girl, Sir Miles," said Burrell, stealing a sly, spiteful glance at Sir Miles,

"Poor little outcast wretch!" exclaimed Sir Miles, with just the slightest touch of pity and relenting in his tone. "Bred up among the refuse of humanity—murderers, thieves, and abandoned women, how well would it have been for her had she died in the hour of her birth, or that the bullet which slew her mother had discharged a double mission, and taken her life also!"

"'Tis very easy to take her out of this life, Sir Miles, and make a lady of her, if you are so minded," remarked Burrell with a sneer which was observed by Sir Miles, who sharply answered—

"None of your sarcasms, sir. You know how I hated her mother, now I hate that child for its mother's sake. Procure for me those papers on your own terms, and let her sink into the contaminations of those who surround her, though her accursed mother pursue me with her ghastly frowning face, as she does now, to my dying hour. Yes, yes," pursued the baronet, as with a frenzied look he leaned forward from the pillows that supported him, and seemed to apostrophize some figure at the foot of the bed.

"Yes, yes—mop and mow, and gibber with those pale lips! thou art but a shadow; thy form is unsubstantial air. Does it not elude me ever when I try to grasp it? Thou canst not do me hurt. I fear thee not thou blood-bedabbled spectre; if such an unsubstantial thing can feel—suffer, suffer in thy world beyond the grave, in thy knowledge how my wrath and hate pursue thy child!"

The teeth of the man Burrell fairly chattered with fright while Sir Miles thus addressed the phantom waked by his own guilty conscience, and as the baronet sank back, pale and exhausted, he muttered to himself—

"Who knows? Perhaps he does see my lady's ghost. I've heerd as ghosts sometimes come about without showing themselves to everybody, only just those as they has a spite agin. I'll repent, I will, only just let me get the thousand pound out of him, that's all. I'll go and hear all the Methody preachers and carry a bible about in my pocket!"

As Mr. Burrell, Atkins, or Hobson—for the gentleman had many aliases—and neither the name poor Crazy Jane called him by, nor either of the others, was his real one, as Mr. Burrell then arrived at the above pious conclusion, Sir Miles, who had been exhausted by his paroxysm of superstitious conceit, opened his eyes and turned them with a ghastly look upon Burrell.

The man strove, in his way, to comfort his master.

"Come, Sir Miles, come sir," he said; "cheer up a bit, and don't let us talk any more of this nasty business what puts such ugly notions in your head. Don't bother yourself no more about it. I'll get the papers for you, all right, never fear. I means to try kindness with Red Reuben as they calls him; he's one as may be led, but not drove; but as I said before, it is in danger of my own life I go among the wild lot down in the East, and that is why I ask for something handsome for taking the risk. So now, as that matter is settled, I have something to tell you which I calculate nobody has let out to you yet, about Lieutenant Mandeville and Miss Florence Amery."

"Mandeville—curse him, curse him!" ejaculated Sir Miles, roused at once from his lethargy by the name of his hated rival.

"Oh, it aint no use getting in a rage and making yourself ill, Sir Miles. Your cursing the leeftenant doesn't do him no harm, and it does a deal to yourself, cause it keeps you ill, while he is getting well, and it is talked about that he and Miss Florence are to be married afore his regiment goes off for Spain."

Sir Miles fairly shook with fury at this announcement, but he endeavoured to control himself.

"It is true, it is true," he gasped. "You are right Burrell, my illness defeats my firmest purpose. I must

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I will be cool. How are matters proceeding with the Amerys? Manders seems strangely neglectful; either he has not called here, or the fools of surgeons have forbidden him to be admitted. Ah! the news that those girls were launched on the ocean of destruction do me more good than all the nostrums in a doctor's shop!"

"I made bold to call on Mr. Manders, sir, afore I came down here," returned Burrell, "and I asked him what he was doing in the Amery business, and why he hadn't put an execution into the house in St. James's Square, and I am sorry to say, Sir Miles, as he talked a deal of twaddle about humanity, and pitying the poor girls, and such like stuff, quite misbecoming to a lawyer. I were thoroughly disgusted with the man, Sir Miles. Well, then it comes out, sir, that Lieutenant Mandeville is almost well, and that Miss Amerys have gone up to town, and are stopping at the square, just for all the world as though the house was their own. Well, and so as the leeftenant must be off to Spain, and you have behaved so like a villain, sir—them were the very words Miss Ellinor used in speaking to Mr. Manders—they had made up their minds, though their father had not been dead a month, that Miss Florence shall be married to the leeftenant, and go off with him to Spain. It was to get things ready for the wedding, I believe, sir, that the ladies have gone up to London."

Sir Miles controlled his passion now; no superstitious fear haunted him either in the contrivance or execution of his vile plot against the honour and happiness of the unhappy daughters of Mr. Amery.

He gave his instructions to Burrell coolly and deliberately. He was to call on Manders, the lawyer, with a note from Sir Miles, commanding immediately to issue an execution upon the late Mr. Amery's house and furniture, in St. James's-square. He was to carry another missive to Lady Fitzwalter; he was to communicate with the Marquis of Bridgnorth.

Sustained by his vindictive nature, Sir Miles managed with his left hand to sign the notes to these people, which Burrell wrote under his dictation.

The man perpetrated a vile scrawl, with still viler spelling. Decidedly Mr. Burrell was not a literary man; but he was what suited Sir Miles Cressingham far better—a most consummate and artful villain. For all the proposed points in this drama of iniquity he furnished an amendment.

The execution in the house in St. James's-square, and the communications with the marquis and Lady Fitzwalter, were incidents of the first scene on raising the curtain. The *thrilling effects* of triumphant wickedness were reserved for the second and third acts.

Sir Miles and his agent Burrell parted, after the latter had received all his instructions, on those terms of amity which always exist between confederates in crime.

That is to say, while outwardly professing attachment and confidence, they each hated and mistrusted the other.

Of the two, perhaps, the man Burrell was the most rancorous; for he was enraged at the haughtiness of the baronet's manner, considering of what unpleasant secrets he was the depository.

Sir Miles, who actually felt as much gratification in the arrangement of his nefarious plot as an honest man would have, engaged in a virtuous action, turned on his pillow as Burrell withdrew, and, ere he composed himself to sleep, mentally exclaimed:

"There goes a fellow who after my munificent payment, would sell me for a shilling extra to my worst foe, luckily no one knows the real state of affairs between us, or would think it worth while to purchase Mr. Burrell if they did."

"It aint no manner of use, Sir Miles, being so mean and sly and prevarcating with me," soliloquized Mr. Burrell. "In course there's something more in them ere papers as he does'nt tell me about. We all has our little secrets that we keeps out the knowledge of our best friend. For instance, there aint no manner of reason that I should let Sir Miles into that little affair of mine with Jessie Jasmine, that happened in the long long time ago, but a friend and a hagent is two very different sorts; how can a fellow act square to Sir Miles if Sir Miles is'nt square to him. That secret he's a hiding from me must be a matter of consequence, and he thinks if I know it I should be down on him for more o' the ready. Oh, he's a artful dodger is that ere Barrownight, but please the pigs he shall find out there's one other besides old nick what's artfuller nor he."

CHAPTER XXI.

PREPARATIONS FOR A WEDDING—CYPRUS AMONG THE FLOWERS—THE EXECUTION IN ST. JAMES'S-SQUARE.

The information brought by the man Burrell to Sir Miles Cressingham was perfectly correct; youth, a temperate mode of life, and an unblemished conscience had wonderfully assisted the recovery of Herbert Mandeville from his severe wound, from which he had endured his sufferings, than Sir Miles from the comparatively trifling hurt which he had sustained.

Herbert was just approaching convalescence, but his regiment was under orders for Spain, in another fortnight the fleet of transports would sail.

Captain Vivian offered to represent the case at the Horse Guards, and obtain permission for his young friend to remain in England till his health was more thoroughly established, but of this delay Herbert would not hear, and the captain, in his heart, liked the young man better for his eagerness to be in the field, which was the scene, not only of military glory, but of that romantic adventure which thrills the youthful heart.

But when Herbert was away in Spain what was to become of Florence his betrothed, was he to leave her a prey to the audacious villany of Sir Miles Cressinghan. Herbert and the Amery's heard of the dangerous illness of Sir Miles, and Ellinor made no disguise of her hope that he might die, when the world would be released from a villain, and she and her sisters from a profligate and cruel persecutor.

The Scotch have a proverb which says that, "It is lang ere the deil dies by a dyke side."

Ellinor Amery expressed the same of the above pithy aphorism, when on hearing that the Baronet was out of danger she remarked, that the devil was certainly good to his own, but that she apprehended his reason for not carrying Sir Miles off at once, was that he was so certain of him in the end, that he could afford a delay.

Alice, who was present when Ellinor spoke, listened in sullen silence. Florence, and the other girls, wept; for they all knew now that Sir Miles would seize the remnant of their unfortunate father's property, and reduce them to utter destitution.

The delay in the cruel proceedings which Sir Miles had threatened, Ellinor believed to be wholly caused by his dangerous illness. The more feeble minds of her sisters, with the exception of Florence, led them to hope that Sir Miles had partially, at any rate, relented.

The energetic character of Ellinor would have led her to foretall the barbarity of Sir Miles—to abandon at once the costly dwellings, the carriages, the servants, which remained, as it appeared, to her and her sisters, only on sufferance of their cruel foe.

But the duel, and the imminent danger in which Herbert himself lay for more than a week, distracted the thoughts and attention even of the prompt and active Ellinor.

Then came the regimental order, the convalescence of Herbert, and the agony of Florence, in which her fears of Sir Miles Cressingham aggravated all the misery of parting with her lover,

In this instance it was Ellinor who gave the wise counsel, and extended the helping hand.

That proposal which the maiden timidity of Florence, and the manly generosity of Herbert, forbade either of them to make, was ventured by Ellinor.

It was she, who though her own heart was pierced as with a dagger at the thought of parting with Florence—the best beloved of her sisters—the only one with whom she felt a real sympathy—yet it was she who, with downcast eyes, and a crimson blush that matched her smooth

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THE MAN IN POSSESSION.

cheek with an opening rose, softly whispered to Herbert that Florence should at once become his wife, and accompany him to Spain.

It was in Herbert's dressing room at St. Oswins, the first day that he had so far recovered as to be able to leave his bed for the sofa, that Ellinor proposed this hasty wedding, for since her father was gone she felt that Florence needed a husband to protect her, and that the dangers that would threaten her even in a country that was the seat of war, were not more terrible than that which had been threatened by the infamous Sir Miles.

The idea of at once uniting his fate to that of his beloved Florence had suggested itself to Herbert, but the remembrance of his poverty, of the danger to a young and lovely woman in visiting a country which was the seat of war, he dared not make a proposal, which to his generous heart, seemed selfish.

How eagerly he grasped at the proposition when it was made by Ellinor, need not be said and how fervent were his words of graritude to her who proposed for him this speedy union with idolized Florence.

As to Florence herself, the blushing tender timid Florence, she softly chided her sister for the bold proposal when first she made it, but when they were alone she threw her arms around Ellinor's neck, and thanked her from her heart and soul, for her terror and hatred of Sir Miles and her love for Herbert were about in equal proportions.

Florence was eager that beloved and favourite sister should accompany her to Spain—should cast her fortunes on the same venture with those of herself and Herbert Mandeville.

Elinor looked grave, and shook her head at this proposal.

"No, dear Florence," she said, "it would be a neglect of duty for me to abandon our other sisters to accompany you. You will be safe with dear Herbert, you will have the companionship of the wives of other of our gallant

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officers who share the dangers of their husbands, but our poor, weak sisters, Adéline, Maud, and Clara, can I leave them like vessels without a rudder to encounter the storm of poverty. You know, dear Flo, that I am a sort of heiress, and can defy Sir Miles to plunge me in destitution, for have I not my little cottage at Epping and a whole hundred pounds a year, left me by my godmother, of which no one can deprive. I propose, if the threatened crash comes, and Sir Miles has the barbarity to seize all our poor father's property, to retire for a few months to that cottage, and take the three girls with me, and we shall not starve while we devise some means of earning our bread, for that, dear Flo, is what we shall have to do."

"And Alice, do you think that she will accompany you, or endure to live, even for a week, in the poor little peasant's hut, as I have heard her call your cottage at Epping?" inquired Florence.

"Alice will do as she pleases," answered Ellinor. "She disdains my counsel; and it is because I think that she is on the brink of a dangerous course, that I am so anxious to remain near our other sisters, who are so very beautiful, and, at the same time, have not even good sense to keep them out of the dangers to which, now that they are poor, their beauty will certainly subject them."

"It is very true, Nell," answered Florence. "They are all three very silly; and Alice is very headstrong. But I do not see there is any duty that requires you to sacrifice your happiness by remaining in England to counsel and support those who will only insult you for your good advice."

The delicate cheek of Ellinor changed from the pale pink of the Indian shell, to the hue of the carnation, as she softly replied:

"Why, darling Florence, I shall not quite sacrifice my happiness by remaining in England. It is possible, dear, that is a little more selfish than you imagine. Do you think, Florence, that Herbert Mandeville is the only noble true-hearted man in the world—the only man worth an honest woman's love? Ah! conceited little urchin, you do think so: there is only one man worthy to be loved, and he loves you. There are not many such, I admit; but others are to be found. I, dearest, have met with one—noble, generous, self-sacrificing. Ah! Florence, if it were not for the threatened destitution of our poor sisters, I would sell my trinkets, and some of my fine clothes, and at once become the wife of Walter Villiers."

"Walters Villiers!—and who is he?" enquired Florence, in astonishment.

Then ensued, on the part of Ellinor, one of those delicious confidences which are the supreme delight of women. Weak and vain, or high-minded and virtuous, gentle or simple, it matters not: it is sweet to all women to talk of their love to another woman.

Poor Ellinor—poor generous deceived Ellinor! Could the treacherous lover, the Marquis of Bridgnorth, have heard how she lauded his high-mindedness, his magnanimity, his pre-eminent excellence in all manly and noble qualities, it is possible that, as he really was not destitute in those virtues, he would have been stricken with remorse, and, cursing himself for the baseness that would stain that pearl of womanhood, would have abandoned the detestable plot contrived by the iniquitous imagination of Sir Miles Cressingham.

But no kindly power intervened to warn him against a crime, or poor Ellinor of a danger. While she was pouring the story of her stainless love into the ears of her sister, the Marquis of Bridgnorth was dazzling the Upper House with a torrent of such eloquence as seldom fell from the lips of any of its members.

The Marquis of Bridgnorth was no base contemptible libertine—degrading high mental powers by the pursuits of a low profligacy.

He was a man of the most lofty character—of the finest gifts—who had been trammelled by the fetters of a most ill-advised marriage; who had too late encountered the woman whom he could truly love, and who was, in all respects, worthy of him: and his morality had yielded to the violence of a passion which could only degrade and ruin its object.

The halcyon dreams of love and hope, for the time, beguiled poor Ellinor; and the gentle Florence, when she had heard this tale of true love, which, alas! was not destined to run smooth, said no more about her sister accompanying her to Spain.

When Alice Amery was informed of the proposed speedy nuptials of Florence and Herbert Mandeville, she both professed and felt an entire approval of the plan. Her heart, in secret, still weakly, but passionately, clung to Sir Miles. Florence, once married to the young officer, would be for ever removed from the baronet's path; and, then, might not Alice, with her queenly beauty, and her devoted love, win the truant back again?"

As some little preparation was necessary, even in the sorrowful circumstances under which Florence was to become a bride, the sisters agreed to quit their abode at "The Cedars"—the scene of the terrible catastrophe of their father's death—and take up their residence, for the week preceding the bridal and departure of Florence, at the house in St. James's-square.

Neither personally, nor through his agents, had Sir Miles Cressingham made any demand upon the property of the deceased Mr. Amery; and the daughters of the unhappy gentleman began to hope that his affairs were less embarrassed than had been represented: especially that, beyond a few comparatively trifling tradesmens' debts, which they had funds in hand to discharge, no other claimant upon the property than Sir Miles had appeared.

The daughters of Mr. Amery thought this circumstance in their favour; they did not know that Sir Miles had bought up the claims of all their father's other creditors.

Even Ellinor was deceived, and thought that the liabilities of her father had been much exaggerated; and that the debt of Sir Miles had been greatly increased.

Mrs. and Miss Mandeville, the aunt, and mother of Herbert, though attached to Florence, did not like the connection with her family, but since Herbert had so generously made over to them the whole of his income they could not hardly object to it, and consoled themselves with the beauty and amiable disposition of Florence, and the reflection that their dear boy would have a companion in the dangers he must encounter without recollecting how great an embarrasment that companion would probably prove, a young and beautiful woman in a country that was the seat of war.

It wanted but two days of that appointed for the nuptials of Herbert and Florence, and she was engaged with her sisters and their waiting maid in packing some of her trunks to send off to Portsmouth, as she was to start for that place with her husband immediately after the ceremony, where the noise of loud and angry voices in the hall met their ears.

By command of her mistress, the waiting maid went down to learn the cause of the disturbance, but the moment the door was opened the tones of the old Butler were heard in apparent expostulation mingled with a coarse voice, exclaiming—

"Stand back, stand back, yer old powder patch, I'll have yer committed for contempt o' court, yer are hobstructing a hofficer in his dooty. Yer dares give yer sarce to a hofficer about his being too dirty to be seen by ladies, my eyes and limbs, we must get up airly to find out worserer nor your ladies, the darties of a hold swindler, what never paid I swear for the fine coat as yer gives yerself airs about yer thunderin flunky. Ladies indeed, ladies as will be glad to turn dolly-mops afore long I guess. I say I'll see."

"I'm blowed if you see anything this side of a week; take that you dirty bully, and learn to speak respectful of your betters."

These last words, delivered in a stentorian voice by Tim Hawkins, were followed by the dull thud of a blow worthy of a prize fighter, the sound of a heavy fall mingled with the crash of furniture, and a volley of oaths

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which would have done credit to a denizen of the infernal regions.

Ellinor Amery ever prompt and energetic flew rather than ran down the staircase, passing the waiting maid, who was looking as if she was ready to faint herself, was called to the assistance of Alice, who surmising that the vengeance of Sir Miles Cressingham had fallen, swooned away.

When Ellinor reached the entrance hall whither she was followed by Florence, Adeline, and Maud, the officer who had come with a writ of execution, was just scrambling to his feet, swearing horribly and groping blindly, his face covered with blood, and his eyes sealed by Tim Hawkin's well directed blow.

The poor old butler, as white as a ghost, and trembling in every limb, was shedding tears, and expostulating with Tim, whose violence he feared would only bring more trouble on the poor young ladies.

"I'll have yer punished, yer murderin ruffian," roared the enraged minister for the first time in his vile career, smarting from the effects of his own brutality, "to dare to strike Mr. Zedekiah Cocklington of Zephen-street, Bermondsey, what as arrested stuck-up nobs, and put in of hexecutions in their dandified homes for this twenty years, an never met with a villin afore, who would dare lay hands on a hofficer of the law, no not even when I took the last bed from a widdow with five children."

"Cause, as the widow, poor creature, had'nt anybody as would take her part I guess, you white livered, sneaking gin drinking, tobacco smelling, dirty hound," roared Tim, "I tell you what it is my tulip, folks in general is to much of cowards with you stinking shunking vagabonds of lawyer coves, you can bully poor old men, like our butler here, or rob a poor widow, or go for to call bad names on our young ladies, but you hav'nt the pluck to stand up for a round with your mawleys, big and dirty as they are. There now, I does'nt care that for your law," and Tim gave his own buckskined thigh a slap that echoed through the hall, "I does'nt care three skips of a lame flea for your law, so now then lets us fight it out, and I'll give you another one on atop of the first.

Tim accompanied this discourse with a kind of war dance round Mr. Zedekiah Cocklington, which greatly terrified that worthy for the further safety of his precious person, and he bellowed out to his follower, a miserable half starved looking wretch who, during the foregoing scene had stood trembling behind the porter's chair.

"Here you Tibbets," he said, "yer is witness, yer sees this howdacious breach of the peace, go and fetch some more hofficers, go down to Bow-street, I'll have this willin transported, I'll see him at the tredmill, I will."

"You won't see nothing in a hurry my fine bloak," said Tim facetiously, "you had better take good advice and toddle home, and get your old woman, if so be as you has one, to plaster them eyes of yourn with a bit of raw beef, or blow me you won't see clear for a fortnight."

"I won't go home," roared Mr. Cocklington, "I'll have you took up you willin, and I'll stay here and serve the writ, as in duty bound on one of your dashing Miss Amery's."

"Better toddle, better toddle afore you gets my blood up again," said Tim, approaching the officer.

"I'll have all the constables of London out, I'll have the sodgers out," roared Mr. Cocklington as Tim had his hand on his collar, and called out to the footman to open the door, with the intention of hurling the officer out into the square.

This imprudent but very natural proceeding was prevented by Ellinor, who aware that the execution could not be finally resisted now stept forward.

Though apprehensive that poor Tim's championship of herself and sisters might possibly get him into trouble, Ellinor was not at all sorry for the punishment he had administered to the brutal officer, who like most of his class took a delight in the pain and ruin, which it was his office to inflict.

"I want to see one of the Miss Amery's," again bellowed forth Mr. Cocklington.

"I am one of the Miss Amery's," said Ellinor, stepping forward.

"Then I serves this writ on you at the suit of Sir Miles Cressingham for the little sum of fifteen thousand pounds, on a bill gived to him, by your parent himself, and which ere bill is overdue three weeks."

As the man spoke, he thrust into Ellinor's hand, a dirty crumpled bit of paper, made still more loathsome by a smear of blood as the fellow had put up his hand to his wounded face.

"You sees as its all right Miss," said the fellow with a sneer, "cos thanks to your flunkey, which I shall pay out for the aggraivated assault, I cannot see at this present moment wery much to boast about."

"I see that you have delivered a writ of execution," answered Ellinor firmly, "and I shall have, in case of your pursuing my servant for the blow he gave you, myself to bear witness that in the execution of your duty you used very unnecessary violence, and applied most insulting terms to myself and my sisters."

"Ha, ha," roared Cocklington, "high words off weak stomacks my dainty damsel. We shall see, and now you takes notice I leaves my man here in possession, and I'm a going now to send in a broker to take an inwentary of all the furnutur, and may be along of it some knick knacks as you'd like to keep, but you won't. If so be at the end of five days you can pay the fifteen thousand pounds, why in course then you can stay in the house, but if so be as you don't, why then it will be walker. Now I'm agoing for a surgeon, and for a warrant agin your flunkey, and mind as you uses my man well or it will be worse for ye."

As Mr. Cocklington spoke he beat a retreat, and left Ellinor to the task of sustaining her sisters, who had all followed her down to the hall in this last and great trouble.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN APRIL NIGHT—THE GIPSIES IN EPPING FOREST—A VISIT FROM AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE—THE COTTAGE ON THE BORDERS OF THE FOREST.

It was a gusty wild night, though the month was verging towards the beautiful May, of which the poets and romancers sing and write so much, and which, in this our dear old England, is, after all, one of the most disagreeable months in the year, with its sudden alternations of dry and wet, and heat and cold, and cold and heat again.

Eighty years ago the once famous and almost impervious forest of Epping was not disforested as much as now, when, though footpads and highwayman are no longer a terror, and fine roads wind through the woods, and pretty villages nestle almost under the branches, there is still so much of the old time left in the gnarled oaks and grey beeches, in the thick growth of underwood, and in the dark and lonely copse, where the knotted boughs almost shut out the sunbeams, and where a silence prevails so utter that we wonder how so sylvan and wild a scene can exist in this age of steam so near to smoky mighty London.

There were gipsies in Epping Forest in those days, as there are even in these days; and they will tell your fortune, and they will cheat or rob you, if you are so silly as to let them, and are, no doubt, altogether most abominable vagabonds and thieves.

Still, on the whole, these modern gipsies are an innocent race. The railroads have done much to knock up their romantic repute, which, like some other old romance, was very picturesque, and equally disagreeable.

In one of the wildest recesses of the forest, in a green hollow, girdled with a matted growth of the hawthorn and the briar-rose, and highly over-arched by stately oaks and giant beeches, a party of gipsies had kindled their fire, over which, depending from an iron rod, secured transversely to two uprights, driven strongly into the ground, steamed and bubbled their camp kettle.

A very savoury odour that steam scattered on the keen

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night air; for the poultry-yard of more than one farmer's yard had contributed to its contents.

It was a rich ragout that was cooking for the gipsey-supper, of heterogeneous materials, among which there were a couple of fine fowls, some half-dozen chickens, ditto young ducks, some wild rabbits and a hare, compounded with potatoes, onions, pepper, and salt.

It was not a large party that was waiting impatiently till the contents of the huge kettle, or rather caldron, were ready for consumption.

Three or four men, and two women—one an aged crone, who, wrapped in her red cloak, was crouching near the fire, rocking herself backwards and forwards, in the blaze.

The face of this old woman was very lean and withered; the shrunk and wrinkled skin was so deep a walnut as to be almost black, and contrasted most disagreeably with the locks of her snow-white hair, that escaped from beneath her hood, and straggled down her hollow cheeks.

Her eyes, though now sunk deep beneath a pair of grey overhanging eyebrows, were still bright, and fieree in their expression; and, as she sat crouched up in an attitude more befitting a four-footed animal than a human being, she might well have passed for a female ourang-outang, or chimpanzee, the days of whose youth had departed.

The other woman, who was moving briskly about, and engaged in preparing the supper, was young and handsome, in the style of her race.

That is to say, with a smooth olive skin, a pair of large and glittering black eyes, softly aquiline features, with a type of the Hindu in them—from which race, indeed, the gipsies are said, upon good authority, to be descended.

Thick coils of shining coal-black hair, coquettishly contrasting with a scarlet Madras handkerchief, folded turban wise about her head; a tall but slight and supple figure, well-moulded limbs, and a walk which an empress might have envied for its dignity and grace, completed the attractions of Abigail Shaw, the wife of the young man who was chief of the tribe in the neighbourhood of Epping.

This man, a stalwart young fellow, of about six-and-twenty years of age, was leaning with his back against a huge beech, carlessly whistling, and whittling a hazel-rod with a formidable-looking clasp-knife.

Under the branches of that beech tree, near the fire, a small hut had been pitched; and three swarthy babies, varying in age from two to six years, the offspring of Michael Shaw and his wife, were crawling in and out of the tent, and looking, as they gambled on the turf, in the ruddy glow of the fire, with their little brown half-naked forms, not unlike a trio of overgrown cockchafers.

Of the three other men, two were lazily reclined on the turf, smoking short black pipes; and the third was ingeniously making baskets of rushes.

It was, as before observed, a wild night—though no rain fell, and the moon rode high in the heavens, over a blue and cloudless sky, spangled with stars, which glittered, like huge diamonds, between the branches of the trees.

The wind, however, roared through the forest with the fury of March or November—tearing the young green leaves from the knotted branches, and scatt ring the white and pink blossoms of the hawthorn and briar-rose, like snow-flakes, upon the turf.

The dell, or glade, however, which the gipsies had chosen for their encampment, was well sheltered from the blast by the girdle of giant trunks and thick underwood that surrounded it; and the fire only blazed the more brightly as it was fanned by the gale which roared madly along the strong gnarled branches that shut out the moonlit sky.

As Abigail stirred the contents of that huge caldron, to ascertain if the supper was ready, one of the men, who had been smoking, threw down his pipe, and enquired, in rather a surly tone, how much longer the meal was to be waited for.

The old woman, who had still continued rocking herself by the fire, looked up, and answered, sharply:

"Till your betters come, Abraham Shaw—till you betters come."

"I should like to know who as is my betters would come and have supper here with us in the woods," replied the man, with a grin that had in it much more of malice than of merriment.

"That's just the very thing I was thinking myself!" interposed the man Michael, closing up his knife and throwing down the hazel rod.

"Who's the betters of Michael Shaw, with his foot on the green turf and the green branch for his roof tree? Mother," he continued, addressing himself to the old woman, "you are growing old and foolish, or fond of her as you are, you wouldn't talk of your great granddaughter, Jumping Jessy, who has more of the home dwellers than the Romany blood in her veins, being the better of any of us here! Abigail, serve out the supper; the men have had a hard day's work; this wench shall not be waited for any longer!"

"And I forbid you to break bread till she is here!" exclaimed the old woman, starting up, and displaying a figure which in youth must have been imposing, as, though now bent by age, her height equalled that of her grandson, Michael.

"What!" she continued, extending her hand, and speaking in a pleading, almost in a plaintive tone, "has he light of my eyes, the darling of my heart, the star of the woodlands, been so long absent from my sight, and when she remembers me, and sends me the Romany sign at last, shall we grudge her the hospitality which it has been the custom of our race, from all time, to show even unto the stranger?"

"Jessy ever belonged to the stranger more than to us," returned Michael, "and now for years she has wholly resided with them. Why did she send you the sign?" he pursued, somewhat angrily; "and who was her messenger?—a home dweller, and moreover a man branded for the gallows. She sent to us because she wants our help—wants us to share in this man's dangerous deeds: wants us to go with him and crack into the vine-covered cottage on the verge of the forest."

"Was thy mother true to my son, or art thou no off-pring of his?" exclaimed the old woman. "Surely if you issued from his blood you would not be thus renegade. Hospitality to the stranger, and war against the house dweller, are the religion of our race. Are we not the descendants of Ishmael, of who e sons it is said that their hands should be against every man and every man's hand against them?"

As the old woman spoke, she drew up her figure till the stoop of age disappeared, and as she extended her long arm from under her scarlet mantle, its folds fell about her with something of the classic, and she looked like an ancient sybil denouncing the objects of her wrath.

"Mother! Mother!" answered the young man, impatiently, "I know all our old traditions; you mixed them with your children's milk. But times are altered, mother—altered for ages past—altered much even since the days when you were the beautiful Deborah Shaw, the queen of our tribe in England, to win whose smiles the chiefs of the Romany came alike from the dark forests of Bohemia and the fertile shores of sunny Spain. Our hand is against every man, and every man's hand against us. Yes, mother, that old legend was for the pathless deserts of Arabia, for the wild mountains of Italy, and the watered woods of Britain. But that time has gone, 'tis past; I have no mind to cry brother with a London thief, or break into the habitation of the house dweller at the risk of being driven to shed his blood. I tell you, mother, I like not the life we lead, and have been thinking how much better it will be for Abby and the children to have the good roof of a comfortable cottage over their heads next winter. And there now, I own it, curse as you will. I have been talking to Farmer Ashfield, and he has offered me such good wages as one of his labourers, not scouring me as a gipsy scoundrel, as many do, that I have promised to go and work for him to-morrow. He knows I am a good hand, as I have done a day's turn for him now and then. Ah, rave and storm; I have mother—I have!

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Nay—nay mother, be reasonable, times are altered, I say!"

The rage of the old gipsey-queen at this declaration of her son, literally, at first, deprived her of the power of speech. for she thought his conduct as disgraceful as a civilised person would have considered a condemnation to the gibbet or the hulks.

Wild and perverted as were the woman's instincts, there was a power and majesty in the expression of her wrath, before which the strong man quailed, for it thrilled him with superstitious fear.

"Hear me, Michael!" she exclaimed, drawing up her tall form to its utmost height—"If thou dost become traitor to the blood and the laws of thy race—if, like the brutes of the field, thou dost become the slave of the house-dweller—go thou among them with thy mother's curse laid upon thy head! May yon bright stars, that shine alike above the pathless desert and the green wood, shower on thee an evil influence! May the wind scatter pestilence on thee—the waters choke—the fire consume thee! Alien to her blood, thy mother proclaims thee in this hour. Beware—beware! never has one of thy race crossed in amity the threshold of the house-dweller, but ruin has tracked the traitor's steps. Brave and bright was the maiden who fled the tents of her fathers in the days gone by, and she fell by the hand of that son of Edom, who betrayed her! Beware, then, I say—beware!"

"If you think that communion with the house-dwellers brings our race such evil luck," answered the man—"why said you that your heart leaped so joyfully at the news of her coming whom we expect to-night?"

"Even because I am old and sorrow laden," replied the woman, dropping her arms, which she had held extended towards her son with a fierce commanding gesture—"even because I am weak; because her mother was the light of my eyes, the joy of my heart—and because I trace her looks in her daughter's face. Oh, my son!" continued the woman, changing her tone to one of entreaty—"say that thou wilt remain in the tents of thy fathers—bid me revoke the curse. Look, my son, thou'rt the last of the right brave boys I bore—look, seest thou yonder star; to thee it looks bright as the dewdrop in the beams of the morning sun, but I see that it is dark with the hue of blood; that star is the star of thy destiny, and death—a shameful death—threatens thee at the hands of the house-dweller."

"Faith, mother," exclaimed the man, "the house-dwellers would hang our whole tribe on one rope. Your own grey locks would not save you."

"And yet you will become the bondsman of these people?" cried the old woman.

"The law which pursues me now would protect me then," returned the man, "and there would be a home for Abigail and her children."

"It is you, his wife, who set my son on abandoning his mother and his tribe?" said Deborah, fiercely turning to the young woman.

"He set himself on, and wisely too, I think," answered Abigail, "if you don't fear the winds and the rain, and the snows of winter, with no shelter but a tent for yourself; I fear then for my children—they shall have a roof over their heads."

"Then their father will have the roof of a felon's gaol," exclaimed the old woman, bitterly, "and behold, yonder she cometh who will unbar the doors to admit him."

As Deborah spoke she pointed to an opening among the trees, from which, at that moment, issued a trim female figure.

"Why mother," exclaimed the man Michael, "you are crazed, or see double, why 'tis Jessy who we have been looking for, Jessy who sent us word yesterday that she was coming to see her dear old grandam. You have taken a spell of the glamour, mother, to fancy that she will do me hurt."

"Send her away, send her away. Let her begone to her home among the house-dwellers, so will both she and you escape from harm to-night."

As Deborah spoke this she turned shudderingly away, and cowering down again before the fire, covered her face with her hands.

The new comer, crossing the glade with a brisk step, approached the old woman.

There was nothing in the aspect or bearing of this visitant to create alarm.

She was a pretty girl, smartly attired in a riding dress of blue cloth laced with gold, with a grey beaver hat and feather, from beneath which a profusion of wavy ringlets, soft as silk and black as ebony, streamed out upon the night wind.

There was a reckless, dashing kind of air about this young woman, and she must indeed have possessed a considerable amount of courage to thus traverse the woods alone at that late hour of a wild night.

The young woman, who among the gipsy tribe to which her mother had belonged was known as Jumping Jessy, and who bore among her London associates the aristocratic cognomen of Lady Bess, came forward laughingly, holding her hat on her head, and twirling round as the fierce gusts quite threatened to take her off her feet.

The moment she reached the group of gipsies, she ran up to Deborah, who retained her seat before the fire, and clasping her arms about her neck, exclaimed—

"What mother—what granny, what not a word for Jessy, and it's so long since she has seen you?"

"And better never again Jessy, better never again if thy coming is to bring evil on thine own head, and that of all thy mother's race!" replied Deborah, rising and pushing the girl back with a strong hand.

"What do you mean by this, mother?" said the girl sorrowfully. "I thought you loved your little Jessy, though she has the blood of the house-dwellers in her veins."

"So I do love thee, Jessy," answered Deborah, "my heart is withered, and thou art welcome to it as the dews of evening to the parched herbage; thy blithesome face is ever pleasant to my eyes, oh, star of the woodlands! But a cloud has fallen on my soul to night: that cloud through the darkness of which the gifted of our race see the events which are to come. From thy childhood, Jessy, thou hast come and gone between thy mother's race and the kin of thy false father. Thou dost not forget the sore peril in which one, traitorous as thine own father, placed thee, and from which thou wert saved by the stout hearts of thy mother's tribe. But the wild torrent that leaps from the mountain's brow returns to it no more; the lamb seeks not a shelter in the cave of the panther. Abide thou then among the false denizens of the cities, or stay with us and lead a free life among the woods, for in thy broken connection with thy mother's tribe is danger and doom both to them and to thee."

"How you talk, granny," answered the young girl; "instead of danger and doom I bring tidings of good fortune, promises of the red gold, mother, which is as dear to the dwellers in the woods as to those of the city. Gold mother, which shall buy you a new tent and warm blankets, if you will needs remain in the woods during the dreary winter."

"Gold, gold!" exclaimed Deborah; "yes gold, that I tell thee will be dyed in blood; gold that shall buy the rope to hang thee with!"

"Never fear, granny," answered Lady Bess, with a laugh that was somewhat forced, for she was not free from the superstition that holds so strongly the ignorant and vicious. "Nay, never fear, granny, the hemp will never be grown to twist a rope for this little neck," and she laughingly put her hands to her throat. "Look you, mother, yonder comes some of my house-dwelling friends who are true to me, however they may be false to each other."

"Nay, nay, Jessy, if they know not truth to each other how should they be true to thee?" said the old woman, drawing her mantle round her and resuming her post by the fire, as a party consisting of Blustering Bill, Gentleman Harry, and the Spider issued from the thicket.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

ELLINOR AMERY'S COTTAGE AT EPPING — THE LAME BEGGAR AND HIS COMPANION—THE BURGLARY—THE ABDUCTION—THE MURDER.

By a singular coincidence, on the morning of the execution in the late Mr. Amery's house, in St. James's-square, Lady Fitzwalter made a friendly visit to his daughters, all of whom she invited to take up their abode at her villa at Kensington, till the affairs of their unfortunate father were settled.

This invitation was gratefully, but peremptorily, declined by Ellinor and Florence. Alice, and the other three girls, eagerly accepted it.

As, of course, it was out of the question for the young women to pay out the execution, they quitted the mansion a few hours after it was levied: Ellinor and Florence for the cottage of the former at Epping; their four sisters for the luxurious abode of Lady Fitzwalter.

Out of the funds raised by the sale of some of her jewels, Ellinor paid up the wages of the servants—dismissing them all, with the exception of one of the housemaids, whom she engaged to accompany her to Epping.

Hudson, the old butler, refused to leave his young mistresses. He had amassed, he said, a comfortable income in Mr. Amery's service: would not the dear young lady, Miss Ellinor, let him spend his last days under her roof? She would be so lonely when Miss Florence was married and gone; and Tim Hawkins had declared his intention of enlisting in Mr. Herbert's regiment; and Miss Ellinor could not do without a man servant in her little cottage.

It was in vain that Ellinor pointed out the probability of her being compelled to let the cottage, and seek bread away from her own home.

Hudson would not hear of such a plan: he contended that, as Ellinor had one hundred a-year, and the interest of his savings would produce another, she might live very comfortably at Epping. "For, as to Miss Alice, and Miss Maud, and Miss Adeline, and Miss Clara," urged Hudson, "it would not be fair that you should undertake to help them. Don't I remember, in poor master's life-time, they would each spend more money at the milliner's in a month than you and Miss Florence in a year? You might reduce yourself to want, Miss Ellinor, and yet not be able to supply their extravagance for a week. Besides, they are handsome young ladies; and, since they have gone to live with my Lady Fitzwalter, she will get husbands for them, no doubt."

Ellinor sighed, and made no answer to this last remark of the old butler. Some whisper of Lady Fitzwalter's real character had reached her, and she feared that the men of fashion who might be introduced to her beautiful but frail sisters, at the house of Lady Fitzwalter, would seek them on terms less honourable than marriage.

Finally, with regard to the request of the faithful old servant, Ellinor was induced to hold the evil of the present as sufficient, and allow him to accompany her to Epping with the housemaid, who also undertook the charge of such simple cooking as the altered fortunes of her mistress would require.

The wedding of Florence was postponed for a day or two by the untoward event of the execution. In the meantime, her luggage was dispatched to Portsmouth; and it was proposed that the marriage ceremony should be quietly performed at Epping Church; and that she should then return with Herbert to London, on their way to Portsmouth.

The Vine cottage, as the dwelling of Ellinor's was called, was a pretty rustic abode on the borders of the forest, standing between the little village of Loughton and the town of Epping, and somewhat too lonely and unprotected in its neighbourhood.

On the second day of the residence of Ellinor and Florence at the cottage, Tim Hawkins who had accompanied them there was obliged to go up to London, to answer a summon for the assault which he had impudently committed on the august person of Mr. Cocklington, the sheriff's officer.

Military business detained Herbert in London, and as the other servants were witnesses of the exasperating style in which it had placed Mr. Cocklington to execute what he termed his "dooty," Herbert hoped that Tim would get quit of the business for a small fine, which he, Herbert, or Ellinor would gladly pay.

As the spring morning was warm and beautiful, Hudson, who was a hale old man, walked with the young groom to Loughton, where Tim had hired a post horse, as all the carriage horses of Mr. Amery had been seized with his racing stud.

The cottage which contained eight rooms, a parlour, breakfast room and kitchen on the ground floor, and four bed chambers on the upper storry, stood in the middle of a large garden.

A wooden paling, with a rustic gate, alone protected this garden from intrusion, probably the person who originally built the cottage, thought either that its simplicity would protect it from thieves, or that no amount of barricade would exclude them, and that its very want of all protection would be its safety.

The garden had been somewhat neglected, and old Hudson had been at work pruning and weeding and planting since the early dawn.

The housemaid Jane, who was weary of traversing the long garden infront of the house, to answer the summons of the bell from the tradespeople's carts, set the gate on the latch, when Tim Hawkins and Hudson left the cottage.

Jane was, however, somewhat startled while busily dusting her parlour, by a smart tap on the window pane, and still more by the appearance of the man, who, as soon as he had roused her attention, began a pitiful whine of distress.

The mendicant who had hobbled up the garden by means of crutches, had scarcely a rag to cover him, elf locks of hair, which, in colour and texture, resembled dirty tow, hung down on either side of his sallow countenance, and his left eye was concealed by a large black patch.

In lamentable tones he protested that he had not tasted food for three days, and as his appearance certainly indicated the last degree of destitution, the young woman permitted him to sit down on a bench which stood within the fine covered porch of the cottage, and supplied him with some cold meat and bread, and a mug of beer.

Then he entered into a detail of his sufferings, stating that he had become crippled, and had lost his eye, which had been cut out by a granite stone when he was thrown from the top of a stage coach.

That he had been unable to procure work in London, and that he and his wife had set out the day before to walk to Chelmsford their native home.

His wife, said the beggar, was near her confinement, she had been overcome by the journey, and was lying with a naked new born babe, three miles off in the woods.

Jane's simple heart was quite melted at this story, and leaving the beggar at the door, she ran to make up for his wife a bundle of her own clothing, and to solicit some aid for him from her two young mistresses.

The dolorous countenance of the mendicant relaxed with a grin, as poor Jane disappeared on her charitable errand, and he winked his uncovered eye in a style more indicative of cunning than distress.

"Precious green, to be sure," he soliloquised, "Well in course I shall take this here bread and meat to my old woman what's in the straw, seeing I have no appetite for it after the broiled fowls for breakfast."

Then the mendicant scanned the premises, noted the number of windows, the fastenings of the house door, and the slight paling round the garden, with a precision that was rather extraordinary in a gentleman whose wife was in such unparalled difficulties.

When Jane returned she found the man carefully engaged in wrapping the bread and meat she had given him in a faded cotton handkerchief.

She gave him five shillings and some linen from Ellinor and Florence, and an old gown and petticoat of her own, with a woollen shawl in which to wrap the poor infant.

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The man was profuse in his expressions of gratitude, and forthwith departed, promising to return the next day for further assistance, which Jane promised.

With the bundle under his arm, the man hobbled painfully away on his crutches, proceeding quietly along the high road through the forest, on the verge of which stood Ellin-r's cottage, till he was quite out of sight of the housemaid, who had fol'owed him to the gate, and stood for a few minutes looking after him.

The man muttered an oath.

"Rot the wench," he grumbled between his teeth. "It won't do for me to look back now till I comes to a turn in this plaguey road, and so I shall get beyond the copse where the Spider is a waiting for me. Them simple souls such as this here gal, is the sharpest of all if once they suspects you."

Presently the man reached a giant oak which stretched its gnarled branches far over the road way, and he paused beneath them as if to rest.

Then he looked back towards the cottage. Jane had left the gate, and with a sigh of relief the mendicant hobbled behind the trunk of the tree, the huge girth of which concealed him, should any person appear upon the road.

In a moment the pretended cripple had unfastened the straps that supported his apparently lame leg, and stood erect, a slight, well-made young fellow of five or six and twenty.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, as he removed the black patch and discovered a pair of handsome grey eyes. "I find it an unpleasant part of my trade assuming these filthy disguises, but they are a great advantage, as they make it impossible for the keenest officer that ever trod Bow Street to swear to me. There is this drawback though, that when I trudge the streets all day on the crutches, my body gets so cramped with being tied up that I don't know how to use it, and my eyes are weakened by being so much covered, though I take them in turns."

Putting the patch in his pocket, and holding the crutches under his arm, the impostor, who was no other than Gentleman Harry, pursued his way at a brisk pace through the forest, till he reached a chalk pit where the Spider and Blustering Bill were awaiting him.

"All right pals," he exclaimed, as his confederates hurried forward to meet him, "we can do well enow without Reuben this time, so you needn't go for to give the poor kinchin the larruping as you talked about, Spider. Ugh! it freezed up the marrer in my bones, and Lady Bess's too, to hear the cries of the boy when you laid on to him so the night afore last. I doesn't think as no good comes of hiding a boy. If my master hadn't flogged me, when his other apprentice robbed him and laid the blame on me, I should have served out my time and been a respectable saddler and harness maker now, instead of turning cadger, and just doing the very thing as I was punished for when I was innocent."

"It's very true in the main what you says Harry," answered the Spider, "I believe as the strap and the horse whip, sometimes makes a lad ready for the noose of the hangman, but yer dosen't know how unnatteral aggrawating that ere young warmint is. If we gets into this here crib without his help, no thanks to he."

"Right you is Spider," said Blustering Bill, "that ere boy o' yourn is a obstinate young warmint. I suppose as how you've not been able to get out of him where he has hid them blessed papers that will bring us all in such a tidy sum when we can lay hand on 'em."

"Sorry to say I has'nt Bill," replied the Spider, "and what's worser, it aint no use a larruping he lad any more on the subject, for I'm blest if I don't think he have forgotten where put them his self. You see Bill, arter I gived the young willin the last hiding about them, I listened to his talking to his self, and I heard him a chuckling over his wickedness in behaving so bad to his father, and a saying that he'd got them papers safe, and would have a look at them when I were a bed. So I lets my young shaver think as he had imposed on me, so down I creeps in the middle of the night, and there, would yer believe it pals, the artfulness of the young wagabone, he had got a rushlight in the cellar he had, and out my tulip pulls a brick from the wall, and says he to himself, "Reuben Miles the papers, all for Snowdrop, pretty Snowdrop.' But lord mates, you'd never have forgotten if you had heard it, the screech the critter give when he looked in the hole he had made snd found it empty. He must have moved them papers and then forgotten all about it. So he goes about more foolish like than ever, a looking in all sorts of holes and corners, and muttering to himself that he must find the papers, he must find the papers."

"Do you think as yer wife took them away Spider, the night as Bess and I had supper with you, and hasked Mrs. Jenkins down there to get over her tantrums."

"What, my wife," exclaimed the Spider, with an air of incredulity, "no pal, I teaches her her dooty better. She's a good wife, is Molly arter all, and she would'nt go agin the interest of her own lawful husband in no sich a way. Besides, I only left her in the cellar for about an hour, and when I went down to make up our tiff, she were gone in a dead swoond on the ground she were."

"I tell yer what it is pal," said Blustering Bill, "if you can find out where Red Reuben has hidden them ere papers, it may be the making on us all, that you and I and Gentleman Harry, what I must say is coming out of that ere mean cadging line down right honorable. Now don't you go for to think Spider, if as how you can find where the lad has hidden them papers, that it will pay any of us to give them up to that ere old Atkins. Not a bit of it lads, that chap would'nt offer so much for them if he did'nt know they was worth a deal more. So once I gits them papers I takes them to a lawyer cove, what can tell me all about them."

"Take care Bill how yer deals with the lawyers, they is the wickedest rogues out," said the Spider.

"Oh, I know the chap as I shall go to," answered Bill, "he's one of the right sort he is, he's a rale friend of our profession, and got Jimmy Twistleton off for stealing a bay mare las 'sizes, though the proofs agin him were as plain as the nose on your face.'

'Well, well," philosophically observed the Spider, "the wust on us may be has his good pints, and it were hard if there was not one chap of the right sort was among the lawyers."

"You find out where Reuben has hid the papers," said Bill, "and never fear about the lawyers."

"It's no sort of use Bill, to let the young scamp think as he is watched," answered the Spider, "cos he's the cunningest young wiper as lives. However he's took up so lately with a methody parson, what I guess is sweet on the old woman as takes care now of little Snowdrop."

Both Bill and Gentleman Harry uttered a cry of astonishment at this announcement.

"Why you don't mean for to go and tell us as you lets that poor idiot go to be made foolisher nor ever, by listening to the lies of any of them ere methody parsons?' said Blustering Bill with an air of disgust.

"The poor crittur is done for if he goes among that lot," exclaimed Gentleman Harry, "he'll never be no more use to you, Spider, as long as he lives, cos yer see whether he cadges or pinches, which some folks calls stealing, he'll want all he gets to take to the Methody parsons; cos them fellers live fine upon the poor deluded critturs, that they tells will go to hell, and which I suppose fancies going there, since they forks out so for the chaps what tell 'em they'll go there. You are taken in and done for, Spider, you are, and no mistake, if so be as Reuben goss arter a Methody parson, for every blessed rap as the poor boy gets will go to that ere parson."

"Stop a little, Harry," answered the Spider; "this child was not born yesterday. What does yer suppose that Reuben goes after the Methody for? I have my own little game, pals, I have. I thought at first of cracking the chapel crib, but bless you, pals, it warn't no go. The mean-spirited wagabonds uses nothing but plated ware in the chapel, they thinks that is good enough for the cove up aloft, and they takes precious care to have the rale thing in their own houses. A part, pals, of the plate for the bread and wine in the chapel aint nothing but

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copper washed with silver, but in Mr. Graball's own house, ah! that is a horse of another colour, plenty of solid silver plate there, and maybe a gold watch or two, and some jigamaree trinkets into the bargain."

"What, Spider!" ejaculated Gentleman Harry, "you mean to say that the Methody parson's crib is worth cracking?"

"Never a nut my boys as would give a better kernel," answered the Spider; that's why I let's Reuben take up with the old Methody, cos you see he runs of errands for him sometimes, and is a getting to know all the ways of his servants, and if so be as Reuben doesn't think as you've any turn of your own to answer, why you can get anything out of him—he's such a jolly fool; but if once he gets in his nut you've an object, his silliness makes him more obstinater, and not a word will you get out of him though you flay him alive; that's why he would tell me nothing about them papers concerning Snowdrop. But I sleeps with my weather eye open, I does, and some of these odd days the poor fool will remember where he put 'em, and be for hiding 'em in a fresh place."

"I wish you'd ha' got 'em, Spider, that's what I do. I more nor suspect, though Mr. Atkins is so precious sly, that the same swell cove what we are to carry off the girl for to-night is in the business about Snowdrop's papers. You know Crazy Jane were very pretty, and a cove as took a fancy to her when she were young might soon have been fooled to give marrying terms for her, and be main sorry for it arterwards."

"Ah," said Gentleman Harry, who had thrown himself on the fresh turf, and was idly plucking at the grass and crimson-tipped daises, while his companions carried on their discourse. "Ah, who knows, pals, them 'ere papers may have a marriage certificate among 'em, and I tell you what it is," and rising up he spoke earnestly, "I tell you what it is—that 'ere Mr. Atkins wot pays you Bill, and looks as sleek and sanctified as Spider's Methody parson, is one of the thunderingest rogues out. Ha ha, yer should hear what Lady Bess, Jumping Jessy, as she's called here in the woods, has to say about him. He have done things that we shou'd look twice at, mates, bad as we are, and all with that 'ere scanctified look of his."

"Them sanctified looks are a good stock in trade," said the Spider. "I have often wished I could put them on, but somehow they don't suit the cut of my jib."

"I should think not," simultaneously exclaimed both his companions with a roar of laughter.

They then plunged into the woods, discussing the business of the coming night, which was, to break into the cottage of Ellinor Amery and carry off her sister Florence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MARAUDERS AT NIGHT.—MURDER OF THE OLD SERVANT.—ABDUCTION OF FLORENCE.

When Sir Miles Cressingham employed the engine of the law to drive the unfortunate daughters of Mr. Amery out of house and home, they flattered themselves that even his vindictive nature had done its worst.

His prophecy of their future moral degradation, however much it excited their anger, failed to inspire Ellinor or Florence with fear.

They justly held it as the savage insult of a disappointed man, for their rectitude would not be controlled or deteriorated by any living being, it was a quality dependent on themselves, and of which the utmost malice of man would not deprive them if they did not voluntarily surrender it.

There was peace then in the hearts of Ellinor and Florence amid their poverty. Sir Miles Cressingham might strip them of houses and lands, of jewels, and rich garments, but he would not wrench from these two lovely women their pure minds, the hearts that had never throbbed to an unworthy emotion.

Some touch of sadness indeed was known to Ellinor and Florence in the prospect of their approaching separation, and a vague anxiety as to the four fair sisters of whose conduct under the pressure of evil fortune they were not so sure as of their own.

Still the clear sense of the girls showed them that they would not be accountable for the conduct of their sisters, who were as well able to take care of themselves as they were; and for their parting, well, sisters who marry must needs part, and it was a consolation to Florence, to think that she did not leave her beloved Ellinor to a lonely lot, but that in the young artist she had at length met a man who was worthy of her generous heart.

Both sisters were fatigued with their preparations for the departure of Florence, and the arrangement of the little cottage, in the parlour of which they had placed the harp and piano, of which Sir Miles could not deprive them, as they were Ellinor's own property, and on the walls they had some water colour drawings jointly executed, for both Ellinor and Florence possessed considerable artistic talent.

Ellinor was less mentally excited than Florence, who amid all a maiden's anxious fears as to the change of her condition, was more sensible of physical weariness, and Florence persuaded her to retire to rest, while she sat up to write a farewell letter to Alice and her other sisters, whom she did not expect to see again ere her departure from England. Florence brushed out her hair, changed her dress for a muslin wrapper, and stirring the coals into a blaze, for the gusty evening was also cold, drew a little table close to the fire and sat down to write a picture of neatness and comfort, both in her person and apartment, such as only an Englishwoman and an English home could furnish.

Insensibly a feeling of weariness stole over Florence, her letter to Alice was a long one, and as she paused for sufficiently cautious and forbearing words, when they were to be the medium of advice from her to her elder sister, she fell into a fit of melancholy musing, and the pen dropped from her fingers.

Perhaps the loss of fortune, resulting from their father's calamitous end, preyed less severely upon Florence than any of the daughters of Mr. Amery; for, in her case, the statue should have been erected not to *Time*, but to *Love*, as the consoler.

Florence, however, had an affectionate heart—one that clung to family ties. She forgot that neither Alice, nor the three sisters who had cast their lot along with her, would have found any happiness in the prospect of such a marriage as would have been hers with Herbert Mandeville. A splendid mansion in town, and a palatial residence in the country, carriages, jewels, perhaps a coronet, Florence might have remembered were the advantages which her sisters promised themselves in marriage.

She ought to have remembered "how they pierced her to death with mocks;" how they had all four laughed, till they almost wept, at the humourous picture which Alice drew of Florence accompanying Herbert on a campaign, and carrying a knapsack,

Ellinor had daily reminded her that knapsacks were not an appurtenance of commissioned officers; and then Alice, to the infinite merriment of Maud, Adeline, and Clara, had changed the burthen to a baby, which, she said, no doubt, Florence would carry tied to her back, in the fashion of Indian or gipsey mothers.

Florence had been at last so wounded with their rude jests, that she had shed tears; but, in her innocence of all malice in her affectionate and generous nature, she forgot them all now, and wrote to Alice as if she had always been the best and most affectionate of sisters.

Florence became sad on writing that letter; her thoughts flew back to the old time when her father, in the heyday of his prosperity, had promised a large fortune to each of his girls.

Alas, alas! what now would be their destiny?

Florence leaned her head upon her hand, and tears stole down her cheeks.

The wind raved through the boughs of the large forest trees, and passed, with a moaning melancholy sound, round the cottage.

Florence had sunk wearily back in her chair and slept; her lamp was sinking low, and the decaying embers of the fire had sunk into a dull red glow, that, with the fitful flame of the expiring lamp, duskily illumined the chamber.

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THE GIPSY DEBORAH DENOUNCING HER SON.

Suddenly Florence started from her uneasy slumbers.

She had dreamt that she heard a crash, as of broken glass, followed by a female shriek, and voices in angry contention.

She sat up, looked round her dimly lighted chamber, and gasped with a sense of relief.

It was only a dream.

No—there was another wild shriek that rang fearfully through the lone house. It was the voice of Jane, the poor housemaid.

It was no dream. Burglars—murderers in all probability—were in the house; it was the noise below that had suggested the dream of Florence and awakened her from it.

Her first thought was for Ellinor.

She snatched up the expiring lamp and dashed out of her chamber; that which was occupied by Ellinor was on the opposite side of the landing.

The renewed sound of contention, the voice of old Hudson, the butler, mingled with rough accents that framed horrible oaths, struck the ears of Florence as she opened her chamber door.

"Ellinor, oh, Ellinor, awake! awake!" she cried.

Her hand was on her sister's chamber door, when the dark figures of two men sprang up the staircase, and she was dragged forcibly backwards; an involuntary shriek burst from her lips, and she vainly struggled to free herself from the ruffian who held her.

The frantic cry of Florence was responded to by Ellinor, who, throwing open her chamber-door, appeared on the threshold apparelled only in her night-dress.

The man who held Florence uttered an oath as his companion laid his grasp upon Ellinor.

At the moment of his seizing Florence he had snatched the lamp from her hand; and now, as he held it up, and the expiring flame sprang up in the socket and glared upon the affrighted but equally lovely faces of the two sisters, he exclaimed—

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"Crikey, Bill! here's a jolly fix; we was told to bring off a pretty gal, but here's two on 'em! suppose, for fear of mistake, we carries 'em both off, and the one that the guv'ner doesn't want we can keep to ourselves!"

"Don't go for to be a fool, Spider," growled the man who held the affrighted Ellinor. "The young woman as you've got there is the article as we wants; take her down stairs while I secures this here young lady, who seems a howdacious wixen. Come, now, stop this here squalling—you'd best, I can tell yer!" concluded the wretch, as he dragged Ellinor back into her room, and flung her down with such force that, her head coming in contact with the foot of the bedstead, she lay stunned and insensible.

Florence shrieked wildly at the sight of this brutality, and wresting herself from the Spider's grasp was rushing to her sister's assistance, but Blustering Bill, with an oath at the Spider for letting her escape, with one hand dragged her from her sister's chamber, while with the other he coolly drew the key from the door and locked it on the outer side!

"Oh, Ellinor! oh, my sister! Monster, you have killed her!" shrieked Florence, as, aided by the Spider, Blustering Bill commenced dragging her down the staircase.

"Stop your infernal squalling!" roared the ruffian. "If it warn't that it's agin orders, I'd slit your weasand, I would. The young woman isn't hurt, she'll only get up with a bit of a headache, what will teach her not to call names and be so howdacious another time!"

In spite of the cries and struggles of poor Florence the two ruffians dragged her down to the little parlour of the cottage.

There she saw the two poor servants whom the entrance of the burglars had first alarmed.

Jane, the housemaid, was lying on the floor in her night clothes, in a dead swoon. Old Hudson, the butler, was seated in an arm chair, a young man, in whom poor Jane had recognised the pretended beggar of the morning, holding a pistol to his temples.

At sight of his young mistress in the hands of the two burglars, poor old Hudson lost all care for himself, and started up to tear her from them.

"Curse yer, for a fool—drag him away—blow his brains out!" roared Blustering Bill, as the frantic efforts of the old man nearly tore Florence from his arms.

"I doesn't do business that way, and I've always told yer so," said Gentleman Harry, throwing down the pistol. "I bargained there should be no bloodshed."

"And so did I," said a pretty and smartly-dressed young woman, who at that moment entered the house. "My Harry and I are not cut throats, Mr. Bill. The pistol is not loaded."

"Then you are fools," roared Bill. "Here, Spider, help me with the wench," he said.

During this scene, the lamp which the burglars had lighted from their own lanthorn was burning on a table, and the window of the parlour stood open, as through that they effected their entrance. A dark, wild-looking face, the face of the gipsy Michael, now appeared at this window.

"Make haste—make haste!" he said in a hoarse voice. "A carriage with four horses and outriders is coming along the road; ten to one they will notice that there is something here, if even they don't suspect the coach standing in such a lone place at this hour of the night."

"All right," answered Bill; "go and bring the coach round the corner of the wood."

The man disappeared, and the Spider and Lady Bess, to whom Blustering Bill had committed Florence, were bearing her away, when the faithful old servant again grasped her garments.

"Curse you, dotard, let go or I'll brain you!" exclaimed Bill, twisting his hand in the old man's collar.

Poor Hudson still retained his hold.

"Never! never!" he faintly gasped, for the ruffian's knuckles pressed his throat and almost chocked him.

"What, you will have it. Thank yourself for it, old fool," cried the burglar, as snatching up the pistol which Gentleman Harry had thrown on the table, he beat the butt-end with all his force on the temple of the old man, so that the bones crushed like pasteboard.

Poor Hudson's grasp of his young mistress immediately relaxed, and he sank with a faint half-stifled groan at her feet, the blood that spurted forth as from the jet of a fountain, dyeing his venerable white locks, and sprinkling the robe of Florence, as with a wild shriek she fell back in the arms of her captors, happily, for the time, insensible to the horrors around her.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SPLENDID EQUIPAGE.—ELLINOR'S LOVER.

With a fearful sense of pain from the blow on her head, and a vague consciousness of some unexpected and terrible calamity, Ellinor Amery recovered possession of her senses.

Rising on her elbow, by the faint light of her night lamp, she looked round her chamber. She put her hand to her forehead and withdrew it stained with blood; she had wounded it against the foot of the bedstead. Then she remembered the particulars of the late alarm—remembered how she had sprang from her bed, awakened from a profound sleep by the shriek of Florence—remembered how she had seen that loved sister struggling in the grasp of a ruffian who had laid violent hands on herself.

The first impulse of Ellinor was now to rush to her chamber door; it was locked on the outer side, and defied her feeble strength to burst it open.

Her terror was now increased by the appalling stillness that prevailed: no shrieks, no sound of contention now met her ears.

Oh, it would have been a relief to have heard the voice of her sister, even in the most piercing notes of anguish, break the stillness of that horrible moment.

But Ellinor Amery was still true to herself, she did not lose her courage, her presence of mind, even in that horrible position, her energy was with the occasion. She shivered with fear and cold, for she was habited only in her night dress.

Hastily, and with trembling fingers, but with determination, she assumed her ordinary apparel.

Then after another vain attempt to force open the door, she examined the window.

The cornice pole that supported the curtains was strong, it would bear treble her slight weight. The window was no great height from the ground, one of the curtains and the sheets of her bed knotted together, would enable her to descend with safety.

Still continued the terrific stillness which made the heart of Ellinor grow sick, which had a horror in it worse than any sound of suffering.

Not five minutes had elapsed from Ellinor recovering her consciousness ere she had knotted the sheets together, fastened them to the cornice pole, and stood with hands scorched and blistered from the celerity of her descent, in the garden that surrounded the cottage.

The parlour window was wide open, so was the house door. "Florence, Florence," shrieked the distracted Ellinor, as she rushed into the parlour, her foot slipped in blood. A hideous spectacle met her eyes, at either end of the room lay the bodies of old Hudson and Jane.

With strange paralysed calmness, which is the offspring of unutterable horror and calamity, Ellinor took the lamp and examined the murdered man.

He was quite dead, his countenance convulsed by his sudden death was ghastly and horrible with the glazed eyes staring wide open, and the distorted features disfigured still more with blood.

The servant girl was white and cold, Ellinor thought that she too was dead. Then her unnatural colour forsook her, and uttering shriek upon shriek of frenzied horror she fled from the house, out into the garden, out like a hunted fawn along the high road through the forest.

Not ten minutes had really elapsed, since the time when Florence was borne away by her abductors, till the

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moment when, with her firm nerves utterly unstrung, Ellinor fled so wildly through the forest.

Not a hundred yards from the garden gate, she was encountered by the outriders of the carriage of which the gipsy Michael had spoke, and which had been delayed a quarter of a mile further on, where the gipsy had past it, by an accident to the traces.

The appearance of Ellinor as she rushed along with frenzied screams, her head uncovered, and her dark hair floating on the wind, that still roared fiercely through the forest, was not a little extraordinary.

"Help, help," she exclaimed, addressing the riders, "they have stolen her from me, she is murdered, she is dead. Help me find her that we may give burial to the poor corpse, ha, ha, ha, what a blithesome bride for poor Herbert, whose vesture shall be a winding sheet, and whose bridal couch the darksome grave. But, let me pass, unhand me sir I pray you, for I am to be the bridesmaid, and you detain one from the bride."

The last words of poor Ellinor were addressed to one of the outriders, who had dismounted, and who had humanely detained her, as she was about to pursue her career through the forest.

The occupant of the carriage, who had been lazily dozing on its soft cushions, was aroused by the voice of Ellinor, and the stopping of the vehicle, and opened one of the windows to inquire what was the matter.

"A poor woman, my lord," said one of the outriders, "who must have escaped from a madhouse. Poor soul, she was flying along the road without even a bonnet on, and quite a lady she seems too, my lord. For certain she is mad."

"Mad! I am not mad," shrieked Ellinor, in a frenzied accent. "I can tell you who I am: I am Ellinor Amery; and my dear sister Florence has been murdered; and I will find her corpse, and be revenged upon her murderers."

The nobleman—a young and remarkably handsome person—had not been awakened to much sympathy by his servant's story of the mad woman. Indeed, he thought the interruption to his journey rather a bore, and was about to order the postillions to pursue their way, when the voice of Ellinor struck his ears.

All the languid indolence of manner peculiar to his class, and of which he had an abundant share, vanished in a moment. He sprang from the carriage, and caught the distracted girl in his arms.

"Miss Amery—Ellinor—sweetest beloved Ellinor!" he exclaimed—"what dreadful accident has occurred? Look at me, love; speak to me. Do you not know me?"

Ellinor put her hand to her head. The light of the flambeaux carried by his servants discovered the features of her lover: she uttered a shriek of joy, and fell insensible on his breast.

The Marquis of Bridgnorth, who had won the heart of Ellinor, under the guise of a poor artist, knew that she had fixed her abode, under her altered fortunes, in her little cottage at Epping Forest.

The marquis had a fine country-seat in the neighbourhood of Chelmsford, where his wife, who had bad health, and a worse temper, generally retired.

The marquis had wedded his wife, who was a rich heiress, partly out of compassion, because she loved him, and the physicians said she would die of a broken heart if disappointed; partly because his vanity was flattered by this intense passion of the young lady; and a great deal because they had been betrothed by their parents in their infancy, and it would have created a scene, and would have become a bore, if he refused to ratify the engagement.

No marriage could possibly have been more unfortunate. Never was there more thorough incompatibility of temper, habits, thoughts, and feelings, than that which existed between the Marquis of Bridgnorth and his wife. She was a vain, selfish, frivolous girl—so utterly selfish that, knowing his indifference, she was still content to force herself upon the marquis, as a wife, and would have done the same though he had hated her, and she had been aware of the hatred.

The marquis had literary tastes, and was fond of music.

The marchioness was as much of a dunce as a young woman who had been surrounded by the most accomplished of governesses and masters could possibly be.

The marquis, who was really of a kind and generous temper, bore patiently with the dullness of his wife for some time, but when her affection for him took the shape of a violent and ceaseless jealousy, he broke his bonds; he sought abroad for the happiness that was denied him at home, and indulged in amours which, however little they satisfied his heart, at least relieved his mind, racked alike by the stupidity and insolent jealousies of his wife.

Chance introduced the beautiful and intellectual Ellinor Amery to the Marquis of Bridgnorth, and then, in bitterness of heart, he cursed the false sentiment, the indolence of thought and action which had burthened him with a wife whom he detested, and made it a crime to seek the love of a woman whom he adored, and who was, in all respects, worthy of the high position to which, had he been unfettered, he might have raised her.

For awhile the marquis struggled with himself; for awhile his moral principle and his high sense of honour restrained him from the endeavour to inspire Ellinor with a share in that passion which consumed him.

Unfortunately for the marquis himself, and still more for poor Ellinor, Sir Miles Cressingham was one of his lordship's associates: a favourite and trusted one, indeed; for it must be remembered that Sir Miles was a man of rare accomplishments and ability, and perfect in the art of veiling the worst parts of his character.

Sir Miles learnt the particulars of Ellinor's introduction to the marquis, and the honourable resolutions of the young nobleman melted like wax in the flame before the insiduous counsel of Sir Miles.

The career of the marquis had been anything but unimpeachable before his meeting with Ellinor, and the servants in more immediate attendance on him, were acquainted with his *amourettes*, and excused them on the plea of "my lady, the marchioness, and her jealous ways." A wink and a nod, then ensued between the outriders and the postillions, when Lord Brignorth tenderly lifted the unconscious Ellinor into his carriage, and desired his servants to proceed slowly till they came to a cottage by the road side which was the lady's residence.

Sir Miles Cressingham had been very careful not to inform the marquis of his own intentions towards the Amery family.

Thus, as he could not conceal his cruelty in ordering the execution to be levied in the house in St. James's Square, he boasted that Lady Fitzwalter, by his orders, would provide them with a home, and that he arranged to allow her secretly a handsome stipend for their support.

Though the Marquis of Bridgnorth could at no time have pretended to a rigorous morality, he was no practical seducer; his amours had been among women who had little character to lose.

His passion for Ellinor Amery had borne away the landmarks of his morality. Had he been free, had he not been burthened with a wife whom he had never loved, and whom he now hated with a bitterness which no words can express, he would have wedded Ellinor.

Nothing would he have cared for her lack of fortune or of noble ancestry; he would have rejoiced to raise her to that high station which she would have become so well, that it was not without a fierce pang of remorse that he yielded to the devilish suggestions of Sir Miles, and was content that the baronet should reduce Ellinor and her sisters to actual poverty, in the belief that such calamity to them would facilitate his own vile purposes.

The only portion of his schemes, however, with which Sir Miles made the Marquis acquainted, was that of putting the execution in the house in St. James's-square.

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Sir Miles understood the character of the Marquis, he was quite aware that if his lordship were informed of his employing burglars to break into Ellinor's house for the purpose of carrying off her sister Florence, he would certainly warn the young women of their danger, perhaps surrender the miscreant himself to the offended law.

The passion of the marquis had fought a fierce battle with his soul of honour, and passion had gained the victory.

He could not live without Ellinor, she would be dearer to him than ten thousand wives. Ellinor, with her firm mind, could sure despise the censure of the world.

And so Walter Villiers, the Marquis of Bridgnorth thought that the very superiority of Ellinor to the average of her sex should urge her to sink below it.

On that fatal night of her sister's abduction, and the murder of their old and faithful servant, Ellinor Amery only recovered from one swoon, to fall into another.

The outriders of the marquis were the first to enter the cottage, where they found the swooning maid servant, and the mangled corpse of poor Hudson.

They laid the poor girl upon the couch, and, by the aid of cold water and brandy, soon restored her to her senses.

When the carriage of the marquis arrived at the cottage, and he was informed of the catastrophe that had taken place, he would not take Ellinor beneath the roof of the dwelling in which the murdered man lay, but bidding Jane get into the carriage, he took both her, and her mistress to an hotel at Epping, and dispatched one of his outriders to London, to inform the police authorities of the burglary and murder.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SEARCH AFTER THE MURDERER—CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

It was a lovely morning that succeeded that wild night of murder and abduction. The blossomed sprays of the hawthorn, and the briar rose, the red honeysuckle, and the woodbine, emitted a delicious fragrance as their long tendrils swung in the gentle breeze.

Drops of dew glittered like amethysts in the purple and spotted bells of the foxglove, and the grass which had already began to parch in the meadows with the blazing summer sun, looked deliciously green and cool beneath the umbrageous boughs of the beach and oak in the forest.

In the glade, where the gipsies had pitched their tent, the only occupants now were the man Michael with his children, mother, and wife.

The wife Abigail was preparing the breakfast, the old woman mending her worn red cloak, the children gamboling on the turf, and the man with his arms folded, and with a gloomy aspect, sauntering up and down the glade.

The eldest of the children, a fine boy about six years of age, and the favourite of the father, ran up to him, and pulling his coat, asked in his infantine lisp, why daddy, did not come and play with him.

Michael took the child up in his arms and kissed him.

"Daddy will play with thee by and bye, little Ishmael," he said, "go to mother, now, she has the porridge ready."

"You are dull this morning, Michael," said his wife.

"Have I not cause to be," replied the man fiercely, "that business at the Vine Cottage last night, if it comes out that Abraham had a hand in it, my chance of honest work from Farmer Johnson is gone; gipsy thief, gipsy scoundrel, will be the best names I shall get in the village, but it won't be the first time that the credit of Abraham's doings has been stuck upon me, but you and the children will suffer this time Abby. I did so long to put the roof of a good warm cottage over your heads next winter."

"Oh, don't say that, Michael," exclaimed the poor wife beginning to weep, "what have you got to do with Abraham, besides you know it was not he that struck the old man, he only went with Jumping Jessy, and Bill, and the rest, to help take away the young lady."

"Only went to help them break into a house," replied the man, "why Abby, it's all very well for such chaps as Blustering Bill, to say that they will never commit murder, they can't help it, they are drawn to it, as Bill was last night, but I'd give a golden guinea, and its not many of 'em that I has, that none of our race had had heart or part in the business."

"It was a bad business indeed," answered the wife.

The woman Deborah had sat doggedly pending over her work while her son spoke; but now looking up with the same fierce light in her eye, which had glittered there on the preceding night.

"When did aught but evil track the footsteps of our race," she said, "when they traffic with the housedweller," she continued.

"Quite true, mother," answered Michael, "when like Jumping Jessy, who you are so fond of, they add the bad deeds of the housedwellers to those of our own race. I'd be glad to know who dragged Abraham into this matter, who, but Jumping Jessy, who narrowly escaped the hangman for killing her own child seven years ago."

"It's false," shrieked the old woman, starting up "You know that it is false Michael Shaw, you know that the evidence would not hang her, though it was not strong enough to bring her villanous fellow servant, Richard Watson, to the gibbet, who few doubted himself strangled the poor babe. Besides, if you talk of Jessy or of your own sister, her mother before her, was it not their abiding with the housedwellers that brought them both to misery and shame."

"No," returned Michael, "do not think mother to overbear me with your raving, it was their own light wantonness, it was the beauty which was a curse, and the real source of their ruin."

"It was the false and lying housedwellers, whom the fair maidens believed when they swore to them their treacherous words. My curses on them and on you, and on all members of my race, who mix with them or break bread beneath their roof."

"Stay your curses mother, or I may be tempted to forget who you are, and stop you rather roughly," said the man angrily approaching Deborah, and half lifting his hand.

"Aye do, do," said the infuriate old woman, "strike me, do. 'Twould be a deed well worthy of him who sells himself to bondage with the tribe of the earth."

"Enough said, mother," replied the man turning away, "you tempt me more than I can bear, you put your black mouth on me last night, because I proposed working for a home for my wife and my children, and your curse has fallen, for 'tis little likely, but what the business at the cottage, the carrying off the lady, and the killing of the old man will be put on our necks."

"Just so, my man," said a rough voice, at Michael's ear, while a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder; "and that's what we may call a putting of the saddle on the right horse."

The gipsey turned round, and struggled fiercely; but half-a-dozen stout farm-labourers accompanied the beadle, who, pending the arrival of the Bow-street officers from London, had undertaken a search for the murderers.

During the bitter altercation between Deborah and her son, the beadle and his troop had stolen from the covert of the trees unobserved; for Abigail, having supplied her children with their breakfast, was sitting at the foot of a tree, weeping.

It had long been a hope with her and her husband to abandon the vagrant life which had so little charms for them in comparison with the comforts of honest industry and a fixed home; and she felt, with her husband, the fear that he might be in some way implicated in the dark deed of the preceding night, and the happy prospect be lost to them for ever.

"What do you mean by this—what charge have you against me?" said the unfortunate gipsey, when he found himself wholly overpowered.

"Oh! none o' that ere gammon," said the beadle, as

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he slipped a pair of handcuffs on the man's wrists. "You knows what it's all about well enough. It's murder, it is—murder of a poor old man, in a cottage, on the borders of the forest. You knows all about it."

"Oh! sir, indeed, indeed he does not," cried the poor wife: "he knows nothing at all about it. It were Jumping Jessy, and Blustering Bill, and other men, from London, as went to the house, to steal away some young lady."

"Oh! they did—did they?" cried the constable. "Why, it seems, woman, as you knows all about it; and is, what the law calls, an accessory. I shall take you up, I thinks, along of your husband."

"You needn't threaten me with that," answered the sobbing woman; "for, where he goes, I will follow. If murder has been done, he is as innocent of it as those little children."

"And nice specimens of innocence they are," retorted, the beadle—"chips of the old block, every one on 'em—I don't doubt. And, as to your husband not having nothing to do with this here murder, why, he must tell that to the beaks and the judges, and get 'em to believe him, if he can, seeing as how a knife, which was knowed to be his'n, was found a lying all in the curdled gore as run from the poor old man's head."

The man Michael, after his first struggle with the constable and his men, had submitted, with a kind of sullen indifference, to his fate—never once waking up at the pathetic adjurations of his wife, or the cries of the poor little children, who comprehended that something terrible for their parents was passing, though they knew not what.

When, however, the beadle mentioned the knife, the poor wretch uttered a horrible cry, and felt wildly about his garments for the knife.

"My knife—my knife!" he exclaimed. "I had it last night. No; I remember, I lent it to Abraham. Oh, God!"

"Mighty clever!" ejaculated the constable, with a brutal laugh. "And so you lent the knife—did you?"

"I did—I did: God knows it, man!" exclaimed the poor husband.

One of the farm-labourers stepped forward.

"I do believe thee, Michael," he said. "It's most misfortunate that I should have picked it up, and said as it were one I lent thee when we were out coppicing for farmer Johnson, a week ago."

"Mighty fine!" said the beadle. "But, if you believes as this fellor is innocent, I don't; and in the round-house at Epping he lodges to-night."

CHAPTER XXX.

FLORENCE AND HER ABDUCTORS.—THE LONE HOUSE ON THE BANKS OF THE BLACK WATER.—THE PRISONER SECURED.—LADY BESS AND THE SPIDER.

When Florence Amery recovered from the swoon in which she had been borne away from Epping, she found herself in a carriage which was being driven with great rapidity.

The blinds of this carriage were drawn down, and it was totally dark within, but on Florence uttering a scream of dismay, and attempting to rise, the hands of a woman who sat beside her forced her back, while the rough and brutal voice of a man, who apparently occupied the opposite seat, bade her "stow that ere squalling, cos, as you see, young lady, it can't do yer no good, and it may do yer a bit of harm if yer forces us to tie yer hands and put a gag in yer mouth."

"In heaven's name!" exclaimed Florence, "who are you, and where are you taking me?"

"That's best known to ourselves, miss," returned the man. "Howsomever, as yer can't by no manner of means get away, I doesn't mind telling of yer, that yer is being taken down to the country house of a gentleman, what pays us well for our trouble. We'll stop in another hour or so to to change hosses; and we tells the folks at the inn, as we've a mad lady in our charge what we are takin' back to her husband which she runned away from. So they won't believe nothin as yer say to them, if as how yer gets the opportunity, my wilet 'o spring, moreover ve shall take the liberty of tying up that pretty mouth of your'n, afore we gets to the village. And now, as there isn't no house near for a mile or two, vhy we'll let a little daylight on the subject, my dear, if so be as you has no partikler objections!"

As he spoke he drew up the blind, and let down one of the carriage windows, and the fresh air revived the still half-fainting and stupified Florence.

Her first glance was at the scene through which she was passing, her second at her two companions.

She did not derive any comfort from either.

The carriage, which was double-seated, and seemed a private one, was being driven with the speed of four horses through a wild, dreary track of ground.

The luxuriant shades of the forest were left far behind.

On all sides stretched a flat and barren waste, while here and there the rank patches of verdure, the vivid green of the grass, and the nodding clusters of tall bull-rushes, told of the marshes and fens for which Essex, and the more distant county of Lincolnshire are alike noted.

The fellow who had charge of poor Florence, noticed the despairing, hopeless look with which she glanced at that waste landscape.

"Thinks as yer cannot escape my pret y bird?" he said, with a chuckle, as he drew a flint and steel from his pocket, and prepared to strike a light.

"Vell," he added, "you've no reason to go for to be downcast, for you've got for company that ere tight little lass at yer side, which I begs to name to yer as LadyBess, not to mention that I thinks not altogether small beer of myself."

Poor Florence turned her eyes with a look of wonder on her female companion, when the aristocratic appellation of the latter was mentioned.

Her eyes fell on a pretty but most impudent-looking girl, whose beauty had in it something repellant and defiant, in the wicked leer of the bold black eyes, the mixture of cruelty and licentiousness in the hard muscles round the mouth, and vivid scarlet of the lips which were almost full and bursting.

The attire of this young woman was strange and expensive, she wore a gold chain about her neck, and her fingers glittered with rings.

The eyes of Florence wandered from the handsome but by no means captivating face of the young woman, to the ugly and evil countenance of the Spider, her companion, and the amazemet in her glance seemed to divert the fellow greatly, as he burst into a roar of laughter whilst kindling the tobacco, in a filthy short black pipe which he drew from his pocket, then he said, addressing Florence.

"What yer is surprised my dear to find as Lady Bess demeans herself to take up with looking arter you. Vell, she is'nt proud, she is'nt like the gals what wisit Queen Charlotte: you see as Lady Bess's title was took in another court. But she's the right article she is, and no mistake."

The beautiful Lady Bess, ow Jumping Jessy to give her her original appellation, was by no means in a good humour, although she had joined in the Spider's laugh at the astonishment of Florence, when therefore the man began to puff at the rank tobacco, in the narrow limits of the carriage, she shaid sharply.

"Just you put away that pipe my man, smoking is'nt agreeable to ladies, it's what my Harry never does, cos' he knows I don't like it, and the young lady here is just fit to faint away. Throw away your filthy pipe I say—what! you won't, here goes then, I'll soon teach you my man who's missis, and who is'nt master."

As the pretty virago spoke, she started up and snatching away the black pipe, threw it far away over the marshes, to the intense relief of Florence, whose faintness had returned with the smell of the smoke.

A savage oath burst from the lips of the Spider.

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"Oh, don't swear at me, don't" said Lady Bess, "I'm not afraid of you, I an't, it's not your poor wife that you beat and starve, that you're got to deal with just at the present time, so just mind your manners, or it may be worse for you."

The tone and looks of the man changed, he had conceived an insane passion for Lady Bess, and regardless perhaps unconscious of his own repulsive appearance, he indulged in a hope of sooner or latter persuading the girl to abandon her handsome paramour, Gentleman Harry, to reside with him.

"Lord love you Lady Bess, my darling, my beauty," he said, in a fawning accent, "don't you go for to think I were in earnest a swearing at yer. I'm so mad yer see to rap out at that old woman of mine, that I forgets myself sometimes, when along of such daisies as you is my dear."

"Well, don't forget yourself again, that's all," answered Bess.

This broil between her companions inspired Florence with some hope that the young woman might not be insensible to compassion for her. For well she now remembered all the frightful particulars of the scene at the cottage, when she was borne away, and that she had beheld the old but faithful servant, who had abided by her ruined fortunes, struck down by what was probably a murderous blow. She summoned courage to appeal to Lady Bess.

"I beseech you," she said, "if you have any womanly feeling left, tell me where I am being conveyed, and oh, for mercy's sake, let me know if my poor servant, that old man who was so cruelly struck down yet lives."

Lady Bess turned her black eyes on the fair face of Florence, with a pained expression.

"I will not be harder on you young lady than I can help," she said, "no more for that matter will my friend the Spider there, though he does speak a bit rougher than is to my liking. But as to telling you who employs us, or where you are going, that does'nt come under our orders. About the old man who you say was your servant, I am very sorry, I am afraid he was badly hurt. But it was'nt Spider there, nor any of my friends that hit him, it was done by the man that has had the whole matter in his hands from the beginning, and who asked me yesterday if I could take a situation to live in the country for a little while with a young lady."

"It were a main stupid business, to be sure, hitting of that old man," interjected the Spider. "It were not what I should have thought of Blustering Bill. The shedding of blood is not in his usual way; but he were in a rage—that's all about it."

Florence clasped her hands, and burst into tears.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "it matters little that you will not name your employer. I know him well. I have but one foe in the world; and this deed is well worthy of Sir Miles Cressingham."

"We doesn't say as that ere is the cove, my dear; and we doesn't as he isn't. You ask no questions, and you will be told no lies," answered the Spider. "And now, as the day is a brightening, and I sees yonder the smoke a curling up from the place where fresh osses is waiting, and where we means—I and Bess—to get a jolly good breakfast, we must take the liberty, my dear, of perventing you from hindering us in our dooty. You is goin' to be a mad lady, in a straight veskit, my dear; and with your mouth tied up, because you screeches so horrible. We don't mean to starve you, my dear; you shall have your breakfast when we gets out into the open country agin."

The ruffian then, with the aid of his female associate, proceeded to encase the slender person of Florence in the horrible garment of the maniac. A gag was put into her mouth; the blinds of the carriage drawn down; and, when presently the carriage drew up at the door of a little post-house, on the margin of the moor, the poor girl was left in solitude and semi-darkness, and half-suffocated, for nearly an hour, while the Spider and Lady Bess were carousing over a breakfast, to which was sundry delicacies, taken from a large hamper, strapped to the back of the carriage; and a huge case-bottle of fine Cogniac, into the bargain. On re-entering the carriage, the Spider evidently was the worse for liquor; but, as its effect was to set him snoring in a corner, his intoxication was no additional calamity to Florence; and was not considered one by Lady Bess, who hated and loathed the man almost as deeply as he idolised her.

Ere long the carriage was again passing through an almost pathless wild; and, as Lady Bess unbound Florence, and drew up the blinds, the poor captive, as she cast her eyes over athwart the waste, saw that it was bound by a deep blue line, that seemed to unite the earth and sky, and which a hoarse murmur, that floated sullenly on the light breeze of the morning, warned Florence were the waters of the wild German ocean.

With considerable kindness of manner, Lady Bess now offered both food and wine to Florence—a wing of a cold roast chicken, with Strasburg ham, the finest white bread, and Madeira, in a silver cup, which she took from the basket that had held the provisions.

Florence shook her head, and thanking the young woman, declined the proffered refreshment.

"Indeed, miss, you won't eat," said Lady Bess, "come I dare say you feel sick, that is natural, try a glass of wine, and it will recover your appetite."

Florence still refused.

"You had better take something, miss," repeated Lady Bess. "You think you are in the power of a desperate enemy, and so perhaps you are. But think, if you become weak and exhausted, for want of food, how much more you will be in his power. Whatever you may think of me, young lady, I have seen trouble in my time, and I know when we are fainting with hunger that we are not ourselves; we can hardly command our thoughts, let alone our actions."

Florence listened with surprise to this language delivered in a tone and manner so superior to what she would have expected from a woman associated in so desperate a scheme as that of her abduction.

She took the hand of Lady Bess, as white and delicate as her own.

"Oh, you will save me—you will save me!" she exclaimed. "You are so good, and so sensible as to speak as you do, you will never betray me into the hands of the villian, Sir Miles. You will help me to escape?"

"Do not deceive yourself, young lady," returned Bess. "I bear no malice against you, but I shall execute the orders of my employer. He has paid me for my services; I do not pretend either to any pity for you, or any faith to him beyond doing that for which he has paid me. And I only recommend you to take some nourishment because I know, by bitter experience, how little we are capable of defending ourselves when the mind is paralysed by the weakness of the body, I do not advise you out of compassion, but common sense. If you have that, you will drink this glass of wine directly."

Thus adjured, Florence swallowed the Maderia, and even swallowed a few mouthfuls of the chicken; her spirits somewhat revived, she could not think that the young woman who conversed so well would be obdurate in the end.

Stopping occasionally to change horses, and using, when approaching any town or village, their former precautions to prevent Florence making her condition known, her abductors pursued their way along the sea coast.

Towards the end of the long summer day, they entered a district which had a romantic beauty beyond that way through which they had hitherto passed.

The road wound along the banks of a river overhung on either side by precipitous rocks.

From the foot of these rocks stretched a deep and tangled wood, where the matted branches excluded the red beams of the departing day.

There was a savage wildness in the scene that thrilled the heart of Florence with new terrors.

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There was no need on the part of her abductors to confine her or keep down the blinds of the carriage now.

Little chance was there of an encounter with other travellers in that drear and lonely spot.

With the deep and rapid river roaring to the right of the road, and the thick wood frowning darkly on the left, the scene had a wild and terrific beauty that seemed rather fitted to those countries of the south where banditti would spring upon the unwary traveller from behind the splintered rocks, or the dark covert of the woods, than to domestic and unromantic England.

Broader and more headlong in its course grew the river, shining like steel in the gloaming, rushing madly along the shallows, leaping like a snow wreath over the rocks which broke its waters into miniature cascades.

And now the dark woods swept down to the very margin of the stream, spreading over it a funeral shade.

The travellers were approaching the mouth of the Blackwater, near where it pours its wild waves into the German Ocean.

On the banks of the river, or rather on the sea shore, it was salt water that writhed and foamed in the broad estuary, beyond which rolled the broad waves of the deep sea.

Florence now caught sight of a lonely mansion; which she was informed by her companions was the place of their destination.

The house, which from its size, had evidently belonged to a family of some consequence, stood upon a green lawn which sloped gradually down to the margin of the waves.

Clumps of magnificent oaks, the growth of centuries, were dotted about the lawn.

A steep hill, thickly clothed with wood, sheltered the rear of the mansion, while in front the eye wandered over the black waters, wooded banks, and rested on the broad waves of the ocean beyond.

The last rays of the setting sun streamed upon the grey and moss-grown walls of this mansion flooding them with a blood-red tint, while clouds of thin blue vapour floated up from the lawn, and the background of the hill with its nodding woods, loomed black and threatening over the scene below.

The carriage with Florence and her companions rolled smoothly over the lawn, and the tired horses that had gone a long stage, were drawn wearily up before the gates of a wide, grand rectangular court yard in front of the house.

A stone archway spanned the gates, and the heraldic emblems of the family to whom the mansion belonged, surmounted the arch.

Florence Amery looked up; the last red beam of the departing day gilded that emblem.

It was a pelican feeding its young.

It was but a confirmation of years that had been almost convictions, but yet poor Florence fell back in the carriage with an additional pang of heart sickness, for the pelican feeding its young was the crest of Sir Miles Cressingham.

Lady Bess had leaned forward as well as Florence to scan her new abode, but as she gazed on the massive buttresses, the narrow ivy hung casements, the battlemented roof covered with moss, her daring spirit for a moment failed and she fell back beside Florence, murmuring at so dismal a prison.

The huge bell that hung in the span of the arch was struck upon to give notice of their arrival, and the Spider awakened by the sound shivered, and remarked with a grim smile, that the note was as dismal as the tone of St. Sepulchre's, on a morning when it tolled for a poor fellow at Newgate.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ALICE AND HER THREE SISTERS AT LADY FITZWALTERS—THE MASQUERADE AT VAUXHALL—THE YOUNG CLERGYMAN, AND MAUD AMERY.

Whilst the two purest and most beautiful of the daughters of Mr. Amery were suffering under an accumulation of misfortune, their four sisters were entering the initiative of that career, in which gilded vice lauds it over poverty-struck virtue.

It was the night of the abduction of Florence, so fraught with terror to her and her beloved Ellinor, when murder had spread his black pinions, and marked his prey, that far away from the humble home, which poor Ellinor had so vainly hoped to possess in peace, Alice and her three sisters despite their father's recent and lamentable end, shone the stars of a magnificent entertainment,

The London season not at that time protracted till all the beauty of the summer was at it's height, was on the wane.

The Prince was residing at Kew, but Lady Fitzwalter's villa, was not at too great a distance for his Royal Highness to honour her with his presence at one of her exquisite little dinners.

Besides, on the following night there was to be a grand masked ball at Vauxhall, which was then a delightful and fashionable place of entertainment, the Prince was a devoted patron.

The dinner at Lady Fitzwalter's the day before the masquerade, was a small one.

The party consisted then of the Prince himself, the Duke of Alcaster, an elderly nobleman, who had played the part of Don Juan all his life, and did not like to give it up to the juvenile gentleman.

The duke was a great favourite with the prince then, in consequence of the mental affliction of George the Third, Regent of the three kingdoms

The duke was another sort of man than Sir Miles Cressingham.

The man guilty of vice, his great wealth and lofty social position had secured from the crimes which were necessities of Sir Miles, over his vices even the Duke of Alcaster threw the veil of polished manners of that exquisite politeness, which stands it's possessor, very often in goodstead for more sterling qualities.

It is very absurd in novelists to make monsters of criminality out of high-born and wealthy men.

Grievous as it may be to acknowledge, poverty is too often the parent of crime.

Poverty arms the hand of the highway assassin; gives their ingenuity to the tools of the burglar.

Poverty peoples the streets with the wretched outcasts of womanhood—among a thousand of whom, perhaps, not one owes her horrible position to a nobleman or gentleman, but, rather, to a fellow-servant, a small tradesman, a clerk - to some villain who cannot cover his iniquity with gold—who has not the means, if he has the will, to rescue his victim from the horrors of want.

Rich men are not less profligate than their inferiors, but their wealth saves them from the additional crime of abandoning the poor wretches—who, to their ruin, have believed them—to the depraved course upon which poverty seldom fails to urge such misguided creatures.

Murder, itself, so often the result of seduction, is, in rare instances, also, the result of poverty.

The rich have no temptation to crime; for they can, without injury to themselves or others, indulge their vices.

The Duke of Alcaster was really one of the most selfish and heartless of men; but he prized himself upon being, perhaps, a more refined gentleman than even the Prince himself: for the Duke of Alcaster never drank to intoxication—which, to his eternal disgrace, "the first gentleman in Europe" very often did.

The duke was fantastically sensitive as to his associates. He did not take graciously to Sir Miles; though, in his company, as in that of the Regent, the protean baronet appeared as fantastical a fine gentleman as either.

The duke thought Sir Miles too clever; for he knew he had been poor, and he was suspicious of men who had been poor and become rich. He always assumed that poverty was a temptation which neither man nor woman could resist.

Certainly if his grace had been born a poor man, it may be doubted whether his character would have borne inspection.

But he was born a wealthy duke, and for honour and

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integrity he was placed, as it were, on a pedestal, like a statue of thrice-tried gold that had not in it one particle of alloy.

The duke was a most fantastic epicure, moderately even a gourmand, but no one was aware either of this or his many other much worse defects.

The duke had been a handsome man, and with the aid of such arts of the toilette as are supposed in general to be practised by the weaker sex, he contrived still to look handsome, and, with reference to his actual age, young.

The subjects of youth and good looks were, of all others, those upon which the Regent was most sensitive.

He was treading towards the extreme barriers of youth, approaching those dull confines of middle age, which are, above all, so fearful to contemplate by those who care only for the enjoyment of youth.

His Royal Highness, therefore, found great comfort in the youthful aspect of his friend, the Duke of Alcester; it was so pleasant to contemplate a man who must have been twenty years his own senior, still looking young and handsome.

The duke and prince were a kind of inseparables—they hunted down beauty in pairs.

It was not to be supposed that the lovely daughter of Mr. Amery had blazed upon the world of fashion and not awakened the admiration of these two worthless profligates.

But there is something due to circumstance, wealth preserves women as well as men from temptation.

While they were the daughters of the wealthy Mr. Amery, the supposed co-heiresses of a handsome fortune, the most unprincipled man in the circle of fashion—the Prince himself—even dared think of them on no other than honourable terms.

All that was changed, the infamous Lady Fitzwalter had actually got up her dinner party for the express purpose of parading the four beauties before her guests, for a purpose of bartering them, which no bargain struck in an Eastern slave market could have been more infamous.

"Fat, fair, and forty," was the delicate sentiment expressed by his royal highness, as to the style of beauty which he most preferred.

But he had his little caprices of taste sometimes, and he had become desperately enamoured of Alice Amery, with her Juno like form, her complexion of such dazzling red and white, and the liquid lustre of her black eyes.

The third of the sisters, two years younger than Alice, and a year older than Ellinor, was Clara, a lovely blonde, tall as her sister Alice, her figure was not of a like embonpoint. She was as graceful and flexible as a willow wand.

Her eyes were of a limpid sapphire blue, her hair shining, and yellow like the glow of the silkworm. Her features like those of Florence were of the Grecian type, her complexion of milk and roses.

Yet with all these beauties which were the ideal of poetry and painting, Clara Amery had sometimes been passed by in the presence of her sister Ellinor, for she was totally deficient in expression.

Her face was not like an alabaster vase, lighted by the lamp of intelligence within.

Physical perfection was in her beauty, but not a ray of mind, shew as an exquisitely fashioned statue that breathed and moved, and spoke animated it could scarcely be said to be.

The worn and jaded taste of the Duke of Alcaster, formed an absolute relief in the passionless insipidity of Clara Amery.

The party at Lady Fitzwalter's as before assumed was small, consisting only of the Prince Regent, the Duke of Alcaster, Sir Miles Cressingham, and his foolish imitator, Lord Amersley.

Of ladies, the fair hostess had only the four beauties, whom she had prevailed upon to take up their abode with her.

The most exquisite, viands the most racy wines, were served with most exquisite good taste.

The dishes, if few in number, were perfect in their kind. Lady Fitzwalter's cook was an adept; and the Regent's commendation of her little dinners had brought within her circle many a rich titled or untitled fool, who would pay for a dinner so served, in such select company the price of heavy losses at the card-table, which always closed the entertainment.

The Regent, during the dinner, was oppressive in his attentions to Alice; and the Duke of Alcaster no less so to the fair Clara.

Adeline, Maud, and the distinguished hostess were, therefore, abandoned to Lord Annesley and Sir Miles Cressingham.

Adeline was a sprightly beauty—not a little resembling her sister Ellinor; but, with an equally acute apprehension, she had not the same amount of good sense; and what was wit in Ellinor became flippancy in Adeline.

Maud, the sister next in age to Florence, was a lovely simple girl of nineteen. Of an easy equable temper, and an impressionable heart, she was one of those persons whose associates are equally accountable for their virtues or their faults. In her perfect simplicity, and facile temper, Maud Amery would take any path in which she was led by others, whether it were right or wrong.

Adeline, as vain as she was flippant, was not a little annoyed that the attentions of the most distinguished men of the party—the Regent himself, and the Duke of Alcaster—were devoted entirely to Alice and Clara; and, aware of the infatuation of the former for Sir Miles Cressingham, she entered into a vehement flirtation with him, with the sole purpose of annoying her sister—a purpose which she very fully effected, as Alice listened with a dull ear to the flatteries of the Regent, while she furtively glanced at her recreant lover.

In the course of the dinner, the masquerade of the succeeding night was mentioned, and the Prince, pressing the hand of Alice more tenderly than the occasion warranted, expressed a hope that she would be there.

Alice looked down at her mourning robe of rich black velvet, slashed and trimmed with grey satin, and said she feared it would be impossible for her, under her present circumstances, to visit so gay a scene.

The courtly and politic Alice did not refer in more direct terms to the recent demise of her father, as she knew that the name or thought of death was abhorrent to his royal highness's refined feelings.

"Lovely Miss Amery," said the Regent, bending so low over Alice, next whom he was seated, that his breath came warm upon her white shoulder.

"Lovely Miss Amery, why should you resign yourself to the melancholy natural to your recent affliction, by yielding to the exactions of a barbarous etiquette. Throw off this gloom which will oppress you the more the longer you submit to it. I shall, myself, be present at the masquerade. A pavillion is fitted up where I shall sup with my most esteemed friends, among whom," said the gallant, glancing round him, "I shall be but too happy to count the bevy of beauties whose society gives its best charm to the present hour,"

Alice looked at Lady Fitzwalter, as if to ask how she should reply to this flattering invitation.

Her ladyship interpreted the look.

"Certainly, my dear, you will feel yourself honoured and happy in accepting the gracious invitation of his royal highness, who is a better judge of what is due to etiquette."

Thus urged, Alice, blushingly accepted the invitation to the Prince's supper at Vauxhall, as Lady Fitzwalter then gave the signal for the ladies to retire; the gentlemen rose, and the Prince, still retaining the fair hand of Alice, led her to the door of the dining room.

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THE STRUGGLE AND THE WITNESS.

Then he detained her a moment on the threshold ere she followed her sisters and Lady Fitzwalter, and raising her hand to his lips he softly whispered—

"A mask in a red domino will pay his devotions to you in the course of the evening; his pass word will be 'hope and love.'"

Alice tremblingly withdrew her hand from that of the Prince, and instead of joining her sisters and Lady Fitzwalter in the drawing-room, she hurried to the silence and solitude of her own apartment.

The character of the Prince, and the audacity of his amours was too generally known for Alice to doubt the nature of the proposal that would be made to her did she recognise his royal highness in the mask and habit of the red domino.

She might become the Prince's *mistress*. Her heart beat heavily, and her cheek tinged with shame and anger at the thought.

Alice was not yet lost. She had a keen perception that vice does not lose its blackness because gold glitters on the ebony.

Should she, who had at one time such sweet dreams of a happy marriage, sink to be any man's mistress, aye, though even he were a Prince, the ruler of the state, and heir of the realm, his mistress would be no less a lost and degraded creature for that.

Her heart throbbed with fierce indignation against Sir Miles; he had won her heart to trample on it; he had hurled from affluence into this detested poverty, which alone made her hesitate in thinking of the words of the Prince.

She did hesitate however, and 'tis long since it was an axiom that the woman who hesitates is lost.

Alice did not intend to lose herself, however; she might meet his royal highness under his proposed disguise of a red domino. It had already been arranged that Lady Fitzwalter and her fair protegees should wear the costume of Queen Elizabeth and her maids of honour. The Prince,

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therefore, knew under what garb to recognise her, who in stately height and dignity of deportment exceeded all her sisters.

Yes, Alice would meet the Prince, and she would take good care that Sir Miles should be made acquainted with the appointment. Might she not pique him into a return to his allegiance to her? Would he still return only coldness and ingratitude for that love for which a man so handsome and accomplished as the Prince had sued.

Alice thought not that she was about to place herself in a position of danger; her pride, she fancied, would secure her from harm.

Like many much older and wiser people, she did not know herself.

She dashed away the tears which had forced themselves from her eyes; she bathed her face with perfumed water; and, resplendent in her beauty, she went down to the drawing-room.

To reach that apartment from her chamber, it was necessary to pass through the hall. This hall, at Lady Fitzwalter's villa, was worthy the costly decorations of the other apartments. The roof, painted to represent the sky, spotted with golden stars, was supported by twelve Ionic columns of porphery. In the spaces between the columns were placed, alternately, alabaster vases, on pedestals of malachite, filled with rare flowers; and figures of dancing nymphs, holding lamps of rose-coloured glass, set in silver.

In her way down to the hall, Alice encountered her sister Maud, who had also been up to her own apartment, for the purpose of making some slight alteration in her toilette.

As the two sisters descended the marble staircase, with its bronze balustrade, they heard the sound of angry and contending voices in the hall; and found Lady Fitzwalter's butler—usually the pink of aristocratic neatness and propriety—in angry discussion with a young man, whose carefully brushed but threadbare clothing told a sad tale of genteel poverty.

Though his cheek was sunk, and his form somewhat wasted with low-living and mental anxiety, he still appeared as a first-class gentleman, and an eminently handsome man.

"It is impossible that my lady should see you to-night, I tell you, sir," said the butler, angrily. "Did you hear me say, sir, as the Prince is dining here, sir? The Prince!—and you come here with your low-lived stories of your mother being a dying, and you not having no doctor, nor no food! Does you think that my lady, while she has the Regent hisself a dining with her, wants to be troubled with stories—to want to go a plaguing and annoying her—just at this time? Well, you poor folks are outrageous articles—and no mistake!"

The young man patiently endured this volley of insolence; then he said, in a deprecatory tone:

"Do you persist in refusing to take a message from me to Lady Fitzwalter? I cannot think that she will be pleased at your concealing from her the condition of her only sister."

"I don't go up to her ladyship with any such story to-night," answered the servant; "and I wonder, for my part, that you ain't ashamed to come here and call yourself my lady's nevvey—a disgracing her with your poverty."

The young man's eyes, as the brutal servant spoke, fell sorrowfully on the sleeve of his own threadbare coat.

"Nothing but the condition of my mother could have urged me on thus intruding on Lady Fitzwalter; nor can I think that your conduct in refusing to admit me will meet the approbation of her ladyship."

As he spoke these last words, the young man was turning sorrowfully away, and would have quitted the house, had not Maud Amery, who, with her sister Alice, had paused on the stairs, and overheard the whole conversation, glided forward, despite the remonstrance of Alice.

Maud Amery was kind-hearted, and one of the gentlest of human beings. Like many other apparently weak people, she had some dash of obstinacy in her temper; and when Alice wanted to draw her away, and said it was no business of hers to meddle between Lady Fitzwalter and her poor relations, Maud was only made the more determined to have her own way.

While Maud, therefore, coming forward, asked the gentleman by what name she should announce him to her ladyship, Alice gathered about her velvet and point lace, and swept through the hall, with an air of extreme dignity.

"If you will tell Lady Fitzwalter that Gerald Warburton prays for speech with her, young lady," said the stranger, "I shall be very grateful."

These were common-place words; but the manner in which they were pronounced touched the heart of Maud—the speaker was so evidently a distressed gentleman.

Your very gentle people are sometimes the most determined of any. With a tone and an air of authority which her sisters Alice and Ellinor could not have rivalled, Maud made the insolent butler show the gentleman into the morning parlour, and hastened to the blue drawing-room, where Lady Fitzwalter was half-dozing on a sofa—her gentleman guests not having yet left their wine.

With an eagerness of manner quite unlike her usual graceful apathy, Maud told Lady Fitzwalter that a young gentleman, who was in great trouble, wished to see her—his name was Gerald Warburton. Scarce aware of what she was saying, Maud added that this was a very handsome young gentleman.

Alice expanded her black eyes with a look of astonishment as she caught this phrase, and a smile curled her lip. Clara and Adeline laughed outright. Lady Fitzwalter, however, in no respect shared the merriment of the three young ladies; nor did she, in her own agitation, notice the unusual vivacity of Maud.

In a corner of the most selfish and perverted hearts there generally lurks some pulse that throbs to better feelings; through the darkness that shadows a corrupt soul gleams some faint ray of a heavenly light, which shall, perhaps, brighten to disperse those clouds.

Wicked as had been, and still was, the life of Lady Fitzwalter, there was one white spot in her tainted nature.

She had a younger sister—left an orphan, soon after her marriage with Lord Fitzwalter.

People of luxurious habits never have much money to spare; therefore, out of the large fortune left to her by her first husband, Lady Fitzwalter gave her sister only a dowry of three thousand pounds.

This, however, was sufficient to establish Ada happily in her marriage with a young clergyman, of the name of Warburton.

Lady Fitzwalter was very glad to see her sister so married; for she admired and venerated that purity of mind and manners in Ada in which she herself was so totally deficient.

For ten years Ada Warburton lived one of those quiet happy lives decreed, alas! to few in this world, and which are due only to virtuous hearts, a total absence of ambition, and a modest competency. Clouds, however, will darken the most serene sky.

Mr. Warburton, on his marriage, had been appointed by a friend, whom he had known at college, to a small living in Wales.

The income did not exceed two hundred a year. With Ada's economy, and her husband's simple tastes, it enabled them to meet all their expenses—having, also, the small quarterly returns for the three thousand pounds which Lady Fitzwalter had placed, at her sister's disposal, in the funds.

With the claims of a large and fast increasing family, and Warburton's benevolence to his poor parishioners, it was, however, impossible, to save anything out of such an income.

In the eleventh year of his marriage Mr. Warburton

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fell ill. He had contracted a cold, in crossing the mountains, on a visit to one of the poor persons above named; and died, at the end of two months, of rapid consumption.

Poor Ada!—how cruel was the change that she then encountered: a widow, with five young children!

The gentleman who had bestowed the living on Mr. Warburton gave some assistance to his widow, and undertook to defray the college education of her eldest son.

But he was not rich; and, in doing this, he said he had done as much as he could afford.

Mrs. Warburton removed to the neighbourhood of London, and commenced the arduous task of bringing up a family what is called genteely on limited means.

Lady Fitzwalter really loved her sister, and was of occasional assistance to her; but her personal extravagance was such that she really had not the power to do that which her will was good for.

The fell fiend, consumption, that had destroyed their father, fastened on all the children of Mrs. Warburton, save her eldest son.

He had been educated for the church, by the gentleman who had befriended his father; but, unfortunately for Gerald Warburton, this gentleman died immediately after the young clergyman was ordained.

A curacy of sixty pounds a year, at a church in Wiltshire, was all that poor Gerald could obtain; and out of that he had to provide mainly for his mother, and her only other remaining child—a beautiful girl of eighteen, in whom the fatal malady of the family had assumed its most lingering form.

It was not long after she had taken up her abode in London that Mrs. Warburton became, with great grief and shame, acquainted with the immoral character of her sister.

Lady Fitzwalter had been as kind and generous to her as her extravagance would permit. She really loved her sister; and Mrs. Warburton had most devotedly loved her in return.

As the wife of a simple country clergyman, who had at heart all the duties of his calling, Mrs. Warburton was even rigid in her notions of female virtue; and it was very bitter to her to find that her beloved sister had not only deviated far from the standard of propriety, but was, in fact, a most dissolute and immoral woman.

Mrs. Warburton, from the time she became fully aware of the vicious life of Lady Fitzwalter, refused any longer to benefit by her assistance.

Mrs. Warburton ventured more than this, she expostulated, she sought to turn Lady Fitzwalter from the error of her ways, and the latter of course, bitterly resented the interference. Then long years elapsed, and the sisters never met, and Mrs. Warburton while able to support her children by her exertions in a day school, which she had established, did not envy her the opulence which she so darkly purchased with her infamy.

But the lot of virtue is a hard one, she may hold herself fortunate if she can wear linsey wolsey, while vice is robed in purple and fine linen.

The protracted illness, and subsequent demise of four out of her five child en sorely trenched on Mrs. Warburton's narrow means.

She was obliged to dispose of her school, and the price for which she sold it was all expended on the last illness of her eldest daughter.

Her son Gerald toiling in the country, on his curacy at forty pounds a year, had sent more than half of that narrow stipend to his mother. The poor young man lodged in the deserted vicarage, on a diet little more luxurious than that of a Trappist monk, for his principal food was bread and potatoes, and if he could occasionally procure a rasher of bacon, or one of the farmers among the parishioners invite him to dinner, he though himself as luxurious as an alderman.

Mrs. Warburton meanwhile had also denied herself common necessaries, to purchase more than some delicacy which she vainly hoped might tempt the appetite of her sick daughter.

But when all was over, when the last of her lovely girls was laid in the grave, Mrs. Warburton's own health broke down.

Watching, fatigue, and low living had done their work, and to put the covering stroke to her misery, a brutal landlord seized the furniture of the two rooms she occupied, and the unfortunate would have been sent to the workhouse but for the benevolence of a poor woman, a widow like herself, who occupied the opposite house, and who having a small back room to let took the sick lady there, and made her as comfortable as her own poverty would permit.

This veritable Samaritan, this widow, who had given her mite, after she had made up a fire in the little stove and supplied Mrs. Warburton with a cup of tea, asked her if she had no friends who would assist her.

There is a sort of pride in the extreme self-denial of virtue, which is not at all times either judicious or praiseworthy.

Mrs. Warburton knew perfectly well that Lady Fitzwalter, had she known her distress would have hastened to relieve it, but truely she was a sinner, and the clergyman's widow was not so far advanced in the third Cardinal virtue, as to consent to show her sister the charity of owing an obligation to her.

She therefore only gave her landlady the address of her son, the poor half starved young curate.

There were no railroads in those days, and a letter was an expensive affair.

Gerald Warburton's cure was only at Ramsbury in Wiltshire, about eighty miles from town, but four days elapsed ere the young man was able to reach the bedside of his then dying mother, and he stood there almost penniless, having expended his last remaining guinea in a seat at the top of the stage coach from Marlborough, which quaint little town is about seven miles distant from Ramsbury.

The poor young man was horrified at the state in which he found his mother, who was literally sinking from inanition.

He asked her, had she applied for aid from her sister, and received an answer in the negative, nay, more; Mrs. Warburton said she would not consent to be obliged by so wicked a woman.

The young clergyman shook his head. "My dear mother," he said, "make this sacrifice of your feelings respecting my aunt as a penance for your own feelings. You were correct in refusing her help to live in idleness, but in your present extremity it is a duty that you should accept the means of prolonging life from any hand that will extend it, whether of the sinner or the saint."

"My sister Laura is a lost and sinful creature, she has helped to break my heart," answered Mrs. Warburton.

"Alas my poor mother," answered Gerald, "we are all lost and sinful creatures, your hardening your heart against Lady Fitzwalter has done no good; who knows how she may turn to a better life, when she finds you no longer treat her liberality with a harsh contempt."

"I had rather not see her," feebly exclaimed Mrs. Warburton, "I do not wish to see her."

"Mother, if she will so far overcome her cowardly pride as to visit you, who in spiritual pride have thrown her off, you must see her," replied Gerald. "Mother," he said impressively, "I intreat you as a son, I command you as a minister of religion, however humble and unworthy, that you overcome this unchristian pride, and suffer your condition to be made known to your sister."

"But then if I send to her Gerald," answered Mrs. Warburton, "she may refuse to come."

"Then you will in that case, dear mother, accept the humiliation in a humble and self-sacrificing spirit."

Mrs. Warburton opposed her son no more, and thus it was that Gerald appeared at the villa Sausovino on that evening when aunt was honoured by such distinguished visitants, as the Prince Regent, and the Duke of Alcaster.

The effect upon Lady Fitzwalter of the announcement

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of her nephew's visit, was as though she had received a shock from the torpedo.

She thanked Maud most earnestly, and hastened to the apartment where Mr. Warburton was awaiting her.

She had scarcely left the drawing room when the Prince and the Duke of Alcaster lounged into the room, followed by Sir Miles Cressingham and Lord Annesley.

His Royal Highness and the Duke respectively sought the society of Alice and the languishing Clara, with whom they carried on a sotto voce conversation, which seemed vastly entertaining to the parties engaged in it, Adeline, the illnature of whose wit was akin to that of Sir Miles Cressingham, entered into a caustic conversation with him.

It may seem strange that any of the daughters of Mr. Amery should consent under any circumstances to an association with the man who had literally driven them from their home.

Sir Miles had with difficulty left his bed for the prosecution of this his nefarious schemes against their happiness and honour.

He still wore his right arm in a sling, for he had not recovered from the merited chastisement he had received from Herbert Mandeville, yet with consummate craft he had managed to persuade the foolish pretty women that he had seized upon the remains of their father's property for the purpose of securing it to them from his other creditors, stating that he had handed over to Lady Fitzwalter a sum sufficient for their present use.

Neither Alice nor her three sisters, silly as they were, could be altogether imposed upon by this story.

But they were vain and selfish, and so that they could continue to live in the luxury to which they had been accustomed, they cared but little about the terms.

Lady Fitzwalter ere she quitted the apartment, had requested Alice to perform her part as hostess, and when Alice mentioned this to the Prince, he smiled, and whispered in those honeyed accents he so well knew how to assume that, though he impugned not the graceful hospitality of Lady Fitzwalter, he could care little for her mortal ministrations when she left one to fill her place, who might have been the cupbearer of Jove, one who united the youth of Hebe to the majesty of Juno.

Alice cast down her eyes. She was overpowered by the fervour of the Prince's looks; by the warm pressure of his hand; by that indescribable manner which the most innocent and inexperienced of women instinctively understand as the evidence of a love dishonourable to its object, which makes itself known without a word, and which either will proceed to greater license, or retreat, in pretended indifference, as though her vanity had misunderstood it, according to the language of her eye, or the mute and gentle closing of her fingers upon the hand which has too boldly grasped them.

Alice glanced with a sort of triumph at Sir Miles. Was her insane passion at last abating; or was it her vanity only that was gratified by the avowed declaration of the Regent?

His Royal Highness was still a very handsome man. He might, apart from the splendour of his position, have tempted away a lady's heart from the swarthy Sir Miles, with the charm of his manners, his bright blue eyes, and florid complexion.

So absorbed was Alice by the attentions of the Prince, that she did not perceive her sister Maud quit the room.

Maud had been summoned by Lady Fitzwalter.

Never was a woman of the world in a more perplexing position. Fain would Lady Fitzwalter have hastened to the bedside of her dying sister.

But her duty was due that night to the heir of a mortal king; and not even king Death, unless he had been pleased to summon herself, could have forced Lady Filzwalter from her courtly duties.

Yet she shed tears; she assured her nephew that she would hasten to her sister the moment the Prince left the house.

She gave him money; and her housekeeper hastily packed in a basket a bottle of wine, some jellies, chickens, and other relics of the banquet, likely to be acceptable to an invalid.

She had sent for Maud, to enquire whether her absence from the drawing-room had been noticed: and pathetically expressed to the young girl her regret that she would be prevented hastening at once to her sister.

Maud, as before observed, was not a bad-hearted girl, though a very weak one. She had been unusually interested, too, in Mr. Warburton; and she now offered, with great earnestness, to accompany him to his mother's lodging, and stay with her till Lady Fitzwalter could come.

Lady Fitzwalter accepted this offer without hesitation and Maud Amery accompanied Gerald to the poor lodging where his dying mother lay.

The young man thought Maud an angel of goodness—no less than of beauty.

He little knew how much of bitter sorrow was to be the result of the love which he soon felt for that beautiful but weak creature.

CHAPTER XXXII.

RED REUBEN AND HIS STEPMOTHER—LITTLE SNOWDROP—THE PETITION OF BLUSTERING BILL.

THE worthy who rejoiced in the cognomen of the "Spider" was quite deceived in his notion that his wife so much feared, that she would never deceive him. He used her so cruelly, that it was impossible but that she must sometimes shelter herself under deceit and falsehood.

Tyrants are always deceived—whether they occupy an Eastern throne, or are the very pariahs of society, with only ragged children and a squalid wife to tremble at their frowns. The Eastern tyrants—Nadir Shah, who invaded India, and who made pyramids of the heads of his prisoners—and the monster king of Persia, called Rya Muhammad, of whom we read that he would stand and count the pairs of human eyes which had been torn from the heads of the unfortunates whom he had vanquished—were both, in the end, murdered by slaves who had courage to rise up against their tyranny.

So, in more civilised society, and in the most humble sphere, the savage tyrant, sooner or later, pays the penalty of his own crime—sometimes with even his life—always by being duped and deceived whenever it is in the power of his victims.

On the night when the Spider so barbarously hurled his wife into the cellar below his house, the insensibility which resulted from the blow on her head was of brief duration.

Leaning for support against the wall, as she sat up, one of the bricks which was loose fell out. Naturally putting her hand to the aperture, she found that it was considerable, and that within it was concealed a small box.

Her first idea was that it had been hidden there by her husband, and probably contained money. She, therefore, carefully put it back again; and, feeling about in the dark, till she found the brick, she replaced that also.

She resolved, when the Spider left home in the morning, to visit the cellar, and possess herself of this supposed treasure.

The poor creature was worn out by her husband's tyranny; and had resolved, if she could scrape together a little money, that she would leave him, and return to Hull, the place of her birth.

To effect this, however, was not very easy, for her husband seldom trusted her with money for the household purchases.

On the departure of his guests, the Spider released his wife, and as the poor creature made no show of resentment for the brutality with which she had been treated, he assumed that as usual it was forgiven, and even made her acquainted the next morning with the mission he had been charged with, respecting the papers supposed to have been intrusted by Crazy Jane to the care of Red Reuben.

Immediately that the man quitted the house, taking Reuben along with him, Mrs. Jenkins hastened to the

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cellar to secure the box which she had found on the preceding night.

It was somewhat more costly and curious than she expected, being made of ebony inlaid with silver.

A silver key was in the lock, but when Mrs. Jenkins opened it, she found the contents were but of closely written parchment, some old letters, and a slip of paper, on which gaps in the print were filled up with writing.

Mrs. Jenkins was disappointed, here was no hidden store of her husband's, but she surmised that the contents of the box might still be valuable, as she suspected that these were the papers of Crazy Jane.

Education had not extended to the working classes in those days; Mrs. Jenkins could neither read nor write.

"Oh, how I does wish as I had a little book larning," muttered the poor woman, "I'm most sure these are the very papers as Samivel wants, and if he could make money on 'em, so could I. I knows what I'll do, I'll jist hide 'em away again myself, and one of these days I'll find some one as can read and will tell me what they are all about. I'll go to Flash Carry I will, she is quite larned, she can read I know, and glad enow she'll be if as there's any good out of the matters for Snowdrop. Any how, that ere cursed brute of a Sam sha'nt have them, I'll be even with him for once I will."

With this determination, Mrs. Jenkins concealed the papers in a repository of her own, along with the trifle of money which she had managed to save.

It was thus that when poor Reuben sought for his treasure he found that it was gone, and it was so common an event for him to conceal any trifle he was possessed of, and then forget where he had hidden it, that the Spider never for a moment suspected his wife.

The plan of Mrs. Jenkins respecting Flash Carry was frustrated by the disappearance of the young woman who had not been seen by her landlady since the night when Snowdrop was taken from her charge by the young sailor.

The old woman, Caroline's landlady, had retired to rest before the Malay Hamet had visited his mistress, and so noiseless had been his movements, that he had been unheard, and it was supposed that Caroline had quitted her lodgings of her own accord.

The circumstance that militated against this supposition was that some of her clothing had been recovered, and that in one of her drawers was a sum of twenty pounds.

Mrs. Jenkins accordingly turned her thoughts to the selection of another confidant.

Not for a moment did she contemplate giving these papers to her husband, inwardly chuckling that she had been as she phrased it, "even with that ere brute of a Sam for once," whenever she heard him swearing and wishing that he could find them. It had cost Mrs. Jenkins some effort to harden her heart, and not betray herself when poor Reuben was beaten by her husband to make him say where the papers were hidden, but she had conceived the fancy that these documents were to be a kind of mine of wealth to her, "and then," she said to herself, "I'll make it all up to Reuben in the end."

Poor Reuben meanwhile was progressing what he thought the summit of mercantile prosperity.

He was paid to run of errants by Mrs. Barton, and he was paid for knife cleaning and other odd jobs by the renowned Mr. Graball, he had good hope of the donkey and green cart, and above all he saw Snowdrop almost every day.

Tom Starling had sailed on a twelve months' voyage, he had got an excellent berth as second mate on board of a China ship.

Snowdrop had shed many tears at the parting with him, for there was a hearty kindness in the manner of the young sailor which was totally deficient in that of his aunt.

Snowdrop's days indeed were dreary enough when Tom was gone, for his aunt was one of those persons who have the misfortune to make religion and virtue disagreeable. Snowdrop was called up at six every morning, and employed in the household duties till seven, then there were morning prayers, and a chapter in the bible to be read, which consumed another hour. At eight the breakfast was placed upon the table, a very pleasant meal, as Mr. Barton who excused himself from the preceding "knee sharping," as he irreverently termed his wife's devotions, always came in, and as he was of a cheerful nature, and very hospitable, poor Snowdrop not only enjoyed an ample share of the good things with which the table was always loaded, but gathered spirits to endure patiently the scoldings with which the puritanical mistress of a dayschool to which she was sent, and Mrs. Barton herself generallymanaged to bestow on her in the course of the day.

Of course Mrs. Barton had insisted that the child should lay aside the appellation of Snowdrop, the good lady considered it ungodly, and bestowed on her the name of Susannah, which she observed was more christian like than for the girl to be called after a bit of a flower.

If Mrs. Barton, however, had had better informed people about her, she would have been told that the new name of Snowdrop was rather Jewish than Christian.

But this disagreeable good woman was an intense sample of what has been said of all Protestant dissent, that it is a bastard Judaism.

The heroes of a long Parliament and the rabid councellers of Scotland, had as little of the tenets of the gospel on their lips, as of its practice in their actions.

Snowdrop did not like her new name, Mrs. Barton had made herself so disagreeable to the poor child, that she liked nothing that was done or proposed by that lady. She could not understand why her dear Caroline was to be called a "wicked woman," and had almost entirely forfeited the good graces of her new protectors.

The strange disappearance of Flash Carry asertained of before Tom Starling left London, was perhaps a fortunate circumstance for poor Snowdrop, as she still persisted in calling herself, for Mrs. Barton had most vehemently declared that the child and that "irrid woman" should never meet again if she could prevent it, and little Snowdrop who wept bitterly when she heard of Carry's disappearance, would most certainly have gone to visit her had she remained at her lodgings.

"I am afraid sir," said Mrs. Barton to her spiritual adviser, Mr. Graball, "I'm afraid sir, that Susannah is a brand which I shall not be able thoroughly to snatch from the burning, she has got many ways as I fear she'll not be rid of. I have caught her looking out of the window on the Sabbath, and a sound box on the ears I gave her for her pains, a wicked little castaway. Moreover sir, as to the prayer meeting last Wednesday, would you believe it, the little mist wheedled Mr. Barton to take her down to Stepney that very night for a walk in the fields, and would you believe it Mr. Graball, I got into such a row with Mr. Barton as never was, because I threw away a whole bunch of butteroups and daisies as she had picked to punish her for daring to get after such vanities, when I'd told her that she was to stay at home till I went out to prayers. Now, reverend sir, what do you think as Barton had the wickedness to say, moreover in the hearing of the girl."

Mr. Graball turned up his eyes in a fashion, popularly supposed to be peculiar to a duck in a thunderstorm, and with a lamentable groan he replied, warmly pressing Mrs. Barton's plump smooth hand as he spoke—

"Verily my beloved sister, I dare not venture to guess. We all know how dangerous is the state of our dear brother Barton. Yea, my soul has sweated, I may say, when I wrestled in prayer for him. How can I tell what vain answer the evil one might suggest to one who walks in the mire of iniquity."

"Why, my dear brother," answered Mrs. Barton, "such a saint as you, cannot indeed guess what my poor dear benighted husband said; he said Mr. Graball, he actually said, that the best prayers for a child was a run in the green fields, and a look at the blue sky, and the picking of the fresh flowers, and of praising God in admiring of his works."

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"Hem," replied the reverend man with a long groan, "there is a sniff of prelacy in such notions, my dear sister, yea, in such words there is a smack, even of great whore of Babylon herself: who trims up with gaudy blossoms from the gardens, the altars on which she pretends to offer up oblations. But we will pray for thy misguided husband, my dear sister, we will pray for him."

At this moment, Snowdrop entered the room with more vivacity than she usually ventured to exhibit before her severe patroness, Mrs. Barton.

She was in high spirits, because in her way home from school she had met Mr. Barton, who had promised after tea to take her for a ride in a chaise cart with him, as he had business at Bow.

Her improper exhilaration was, however, speedily subdued by Mrs. Barton's severe reproof, and she crept up to her own room with the vague impression, that if it was so great a sin to be merry and happy, it was very dull work to be good.

Mrs. Barton was so intent on showing her reverend adviser the sternness and excellence of her principles, in the rebuke which she administered to the child, that she did not notice the peculiar expression in the keen gray eyes of Mr. Graball, as, between the shadow of his somewhat bushy eyebrows, he gazed intently on the lovely features of little Snowdrop.

Mr. Graball was what some of the female devotees who attended his conventicle called "a very fine man." That is to say, he was a trifle above the middle height, strongly built, and muscular.

There was physical health and strength in the firm step and strong deep voice of the reverend gentleman, and in his clear, somewhat florid, complexion.

But, however much he might be admired by the fervently pious dames and damsels who rejoiced in his ministrations, we cannot say that he had a classic or intellectual countenance; or that his general style would have pleased a refined taste.

To his rather tall, strong-built, and fleshy person, Mr. Graball united a short thick throat—a *bull neck*, as it is unpolitely termed. A square massive jaw, thick lips, of a deep red, appertaining to a large mouth, garnished with large white strong teeth, a thick snubbish nose, with wide nostrils, a sharp gray eye, and a wide but not elevated or handsome forehead, made up a face in the lower portion of which the animal instincts were more strongly developed than seemed consistent with the vocation of a minister of the gospel; while the eyes, and large but bullet-shaped head, promised shrewdness and worldly wisdom, rather than any noble or intellectual qualities.

We have said that Mr. Graball looked earnestly at Snowdrop; rather, we should say, he gloated on those fair features. A strange expression displaced the mingled cunning and cruelty of his metallic grey eye.

Unconsciously, the reverend gentleman licked his thick red lips, like a hungry Tom cat, on the look-out for a savoury morsel.

It was a satyr—it was Comus—it was an incarnation of the demon of sensuality—fastening his gaze, with depraved longings, on the type of chastity, on the virgin Juno herself.

As poor Snowdrop—her eyes full of tears at the sharp reproof of Mr. Barton—passed Mr. Graball, to leave the room, the minister stretched out his hand (a huge massive hand it was) to detain her. It was an impulse he had sufficient prudence to check; but, as he drew back the member, it somewhat unnecessarily encircled the ample waist of Mrs. Barton.

The reverend gentleman could not refrain from a trial of a groan, as the sylph-like form of Snowdrop disappeared.

Mrs. Barton was a great deal surprised, and a little nervous: the pious minister had never taken such a liberty before.

Mrs. Barton, it should be observed, though not pretty, was rather a comely woman for her years—tall and stout, with an ample development of bust, a high complexion, and good dark eyes and hair.

"Sir!—Mr. Graball, are you ill?" she exclaimed, as the minister's head sunk upon her plump shoulder, and his grasp of her waist tightened.

"Yea, my sister," groaned the divine—"sick at the soul—sick at the thought of the perdition into which thy misguided husband is leading that little one; aye, even like unto a lamb that is led to the slaughter!"

"Shall I get you some brandy, sir—some wine?" enquired Mrs. Barton, excitedly. "Oh! please, sir, let me go. Suppose as Mr. Barton should come to the gate; Lord! what would he think?"

"Verily, I doubt not, after the way of the unrighteous, that there was sin in this embrace I give thee, my pious sister; yea, even in this chaste salute!" answered Mr. Graball, clasping Mrs. Barton more closely, and pressing his thick lips to hers, as a substitute for the rose-bud ones of Snowdrop.

"Dear charming woman," pursued the hypocrite, "thine innocence hath sealed thine eyes. Thy husband, be assured, hath fixed the eyes of ungodly love on that fair child, who will soon be a woman."

"Oh! Mr. Graball, you don't mean it?" said the woman. "Oh! the villain—oh! the false perfidy wretch. And she too—oh! the little minx. This is the return I gets for my kindness—is it? I'll turn her into the streets again to-morrow—I will. It's just what I might have expected; and, as to Mr. Barton, I'll scratch his eyes out—that I will."

"Nay, dear woman," said Mr. Graball, still retaining his grasp of Mrs. Barton, which she now no longer resisted—"nay, thou wilt regard the backsliding of thy husband with an eye of forgiveness—for, verily, flesh is weak; and, therefore, thou shalt remove the temptation from his path; and the child Susannah shall dwell with a pious widow who lives near to my home; and she can come daily to the school where our congregation send their children, and the mistresses are like unto handmaidens of mine own."

"Oh! I am sure you are too kind—too good—Mr. Graball," said Mrs. Barton. "But to think as Barton would be such a villin; and the girl such an ungrateful little minx! Oh! I shall cry my eyes out, and break my heart with vexation—I shall!"

Mrs. Barton burst into tears; and Mr. Graball, in his pious duty of comforter, kissed them away, till they were both startled by a loud knock at the house door.

"Mercy me!" then exclaimed the woman, starting from the methodist's encircling arm—"if anybody has been looking through them blinds."

Mr. Graball glanced at the window, where the setting sun of the summer evening streamed betwixt the laths of the green Venetian blinds.

Then, as the house door was opened, the voice of Red Reuben, enquiring for Mr. Graball, was heard.

"Fear not, my beloved sister," he said: "verily, the slanders of the ungodly shall not taint thy fame. The comer is only the witless lad, whom I employ, because he doeth much work, and is content with little money."

Reuben delivered the message with which he was charged, and left the house greatly disappointed because he could not see Snowdrop, who, during the scene between the minister and Mrs. Barton, had quietly slipped out of the house to meet Mr. Barton.

Neither Mr. Graball nor Mrs. Barton were aware that while they were engaged in their delectable conversation, a lame beggar had been peering through the blind.

A nod of intelligence passed between this beggar and Red Reuben, as the boy came up to the door, and the beggar hobbled away on his crutches to wait for the boy outside the little front garden.

"Well I'm blowed," said this person, who of course was no other than Gentleman Harry, "I'm blowed if that ere methody parson wer'nt a kissing an' hugging of old mother Barton. Wish him joy of his taste I does, though I suppose he can't get at no better. Blowed if I ain't

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disgusted, though to think of a cove what tells others how they is to go to heaven, to stand there a kissing of another cove's wife. Blowed if I sees that I and my pall are made worser; baring that thunderin fool and savage of a Bill, a striking down that poor old man last night, and now poor Michael the gipsy is took for it, and he out and out innercent, not even along of us when we cracked the crib. I'm blowed if my cadging as they calls it, is'nt a deal pleasanter to a gentleman's feelins than cracking of cribs, and what's a deal worser cracking of skulls. But here comes Red Reuben, and I must wheedle him to help me get off poor Michael at any rate.

Gentleman Harry, who had been waiting for some time near Mr. Barton's house in hopes of seeing Reuben, was now joined by him, and forthwith endeavoured to enlist his sympathies in behalf of Michael the gipsy, who was to be lodged that night in the round house at Epping.

"Now you sees Reuben," said Harry, "as it will be out and out ungrateful if you do not help to get poor Michael out, because I know he has been very kind to you."

"Reuben loves Michael," answered the poor boy, "Reuben loves to stay with Michael in the green woods, and to bring home blackberries and nuts for Snowdrop."

"Yes, and Reuben remembers that Michael gave him a big basket of blackberries and nuts, what Reuben sold in the streets last summer, and bought Snowdrop a nice pair of shoes with the money, does'nt he," inquired Gentleman Harry, who knew that if he could awaken the poor lad's memory, his grateful heart would determine his giving his required aid to the gipsy.

"Oh yes, Reuben remembered, Reuben will do anything he can for Michael," he answered.

And so in this mood, Gentleman Harry persuaded him to forgo the chance of seeing Snowdrop that night, and accompany him to the Jolly Tar, where old Stedman had got a light cart with a stout horse in harness, ready to trot them down to Epping.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MASKED BALL AT VAUXHALL IN THE DAYS OF ITS GLORY—ALICE AMERY AND THE RED DOMINO.

With an indifference, an ignoring as it were of the recent awful fall of their father, and their own present state of poverty and dependence, Alice Amery and her three sisters, arranged themselves in an elegant fancy garb, chosen for their attendance at the masquerade at Vauxhall.

The gorgeous, but heavy costume of Queen Elizabeth and her maids of honour, was admirably suited to the style of both Lady Fitzwalter and her fair protegees, who were all tall women. Nor was it incongruous to the fashionable dances, in which the formal tedious minuet still held its place.

Nothing could be more elegant, more costly than the robing of the sisters.

Gold brocade, royal blue velvet and diamonds, was the costume of Alice, the most majestic and voluptuous beauty of the fair sisters.

Blonde and languishing Clara, appeared in pale pink satin and silver, the lively Adeline in pink, and the more timid, but exquisitely graceful Maud in pure white, trimmed with silver and seed pearls.

Lady Fitzwalter herself was superbly attired in crimson velvet, with a huge farthingale of sky blue satin.

The young ladies were left to suppose that Lady Fitzwalter herself had been at the cost of these magnificent dresses, and they found it convenient to affect at least a belief in her combined wealth and generosity.

It was a glorious summer night, the faintest possible breeze shook the green branches, and scattered the perfume of the flowers.

The Vauxhall-road at that time was a beautiful country lane, Belgravier, a waste of flat marshy fields, the river, not yet converted into the sewer of an overgrown metropolis, was covered with boats rowed by trim watermen, and conveying gaily dressed parties to the masquerade.

Lord and Lady Easy going to Vauxhall in a boat was in the child's picture book of those days.

Lady Fitzwalter and her fair guests did not, however, seek the festive scene by way of the river, the capacious coach of Lady Fitzwalter, with its pair of splended bays, received them.

Mrs. Warburton was dead, she had expired soon after her son and Maud Amery reached her lodging.

Lady Fitzwalter was in deep grief for the loss of this sister; her anguish too, was made sharper by her not even had the consolation of seeing her again before her death and they had parted last in anger.

It may be thought strange that Lady Fitzwalter should have acccompanied her guests to a scene of dissipation, when her sister, had not laid a corpse for twelve hours.

Had Mrs. Warburton been a woman of taste and fashion, her sister though she had felt no real woe, would have assumed "the mocking of it."

But Mrs. Warburton was poor and distinguished, Lady Fitzwalter had never even made it known in the frivolous circle that she mixed with, that she had a sister.

Nevertheless her heart was heavy, never had Lady Fitzwalter before mingled in a scene of dissipation with so little relish for it.

The Vauxhall in the days when the Regency of George the Fourth was young, was a very different place to the Vauxhall, which four years ago had its last night, not of the season, but for ever.

Save when animated by the wild mirth, or rather riot of the out of fashion also, bal masque, the Vauxhall known to the present generation was a dreary place enough.

A visit to Vauxhall got to be such a mournful mode of making merry, the thin attendance of the for the most part shabbily dressed people contrasted quite painfully with the recollection of the past glories of the poor gardens, as expatiated on by our father's and mother's.

Those were the times when a gala night was a gala night indeed, but then there were no music halls where the million could imbibe gin and water, and listen to indecent songs, there were no two Italian operas, for the fashionably Covent Garden was jealously retained as a National theatre, for representatives of the noble National drama, it was not disgraded to the performance of Italian operas, those leviathans of absurdity in which Othello wrestles with his agony in a slight of triplets, and Macbeth's "vaulting ambition falls on the other side" of a semibreve.

Oh mournful Vauxhall, with its grand old trees panded and blackened with the smoke of monster London, and the summer breeze that was of old, so pleasant on the moonlight nights, tainted with odours from the now fetid river, and the neighbouring gas works.

How grim and melancholy looked poor old Neptune, and what a poor insignificant looking little structure the Handel orchestra, where the English singers, Incledon, and Mrs. Bland, and Mrs. Momtain, charmed their unsophisticated hearers with old English ballads.

Vauxhall, which outlived so much, and was said at last to have outlived itself, was in all the verdure of its youth eighty years ago—literally the verdure—for there were neither gas-works nor steamers then: the river was pure and fresh, and London not a fifth of its present size. Vauxhall was held to be quite in the country then.

Ranelagh still existed; and masked balls were still the fashion, and sometimes given by ladies of rank and wealth in their own houses, instead of merely at public places, where the company consists wholly of the most profligate, and, in a great measure, of the humbler classes.

South Lambeth was then in its infancy: the Wandsworth-road, bordered on either side with lovely meadows, either stretching as high as Clapham Common, or declining down to the very banks of the river.

The scene was brilliant when Lady Fitzwalter and her companions entered the gardens.

Those little coloured lamps, employed so much, even to the last, in lighting and decoration of Vauxhall, were

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very pretty, with their varied and gay tints of purple, crimson, green, and orange.

How prettily they gleamed out of the dark shrubberies; or twined round the dark trunks of the trees; or stretched a garland from bough to bough—spanned the gravel-walks with rainbow arches of light!

The Handel Orchestra was on that occasion crowded with the best instrumental performers of the time.

Bands of musicians also were stationed in different parts of the gardens; and groups of dancers, tripping to the lively measures of the gay cotilion, or whirling in the German waltz, then first introduced, were gathered, not only near the orchestra, but in other parts of the gardens.

Nothing could exceed the richness of the costumes, or their tasteful variety; for the masquerade tickets on this occasion had been sold at two guineas each; and the whole world of fashion, as fashion stood in that day, were assembled in the gardens.

There were kings, sultans, Spanish grandees, Hungarian magnates, and Polish warriors; there were peasants in the most picturesque costumes, of almost every clime.

The most costly materials had been employed for these costumes; there was nothing but the rustling of velvets, satins, and brocaded silks, the glistening of gold and silver lace, and the dazzling lustre of jewels.

Even when propriety would have suggested the use of some simpler material, as in the case of an Italian or Polish peasant girl, the hair net of the first would be of gold thread glittering with emeralds, and the garments of the last trimmed with the costliest sable.

Lady Fitzwalter and her party, in the cumbrous but magnificent costume of Queen Elizabeth and her ladies, attracted general attention immediately on their arrival.

Their tall imposing figures, the air of indescribable grace and elegance that characterized their movements, drew round them a crowd of admirers, who were all eager to obtain a glimpse of faces which in beauty it was conjectured would match these graceful forms.

The hands of the four fair sisters were quickly engaged for the dance, in which their chaperon declined to join.

Vain and selfish as was Lady Fitzwalter, it was her poverty which despite her hollow show of wealth, was embarrassing and not her will which had compelled her on that night to mix in the scene of folly and dissipation.

Alice refused to join in the dance a second time, she was looking out for the red domino, and was not a little piqued that he had not yet made his appearance.

"When he does come, I will not readily be found," said the offended beauty, and drawing the arm of her sister Maud through her own, she drew her towards the wide and but partially lighted avenue, at the end of which stood the mimic theatre, where up to the latest period of the existence of the Gardens at Vauxhall was used for the performance of ballets or vaudevilles.

Maud Amery was never very gay in her manner, persons so exceedingly gentle and at the same time indolent as she was are never lively. It was too much trouble for Maud even to be merry.

She would have been admirably adapted for the stupid tortoise like existence of the favourite wife in a harem, her beauty was exquisite and her mind the very calibre for the countries and faith of Mahommud, which so debases all that is good or noble in the female character.

The apathy of Maud had been disturbed in an unwonted degree, by the event of the preceding night, the visit of Gerald Warburton to his aunt, and the catastrophe of his mother's death which had succeeded it.

There was no fantastical sensibility put forward by Maud Amery to excuse her apathy, she did not pretend to be shocked as some over-fine people do at a tale or a sight of sorrow.

There are some rich men and women who cannot bear to be reminded of the existence of suffering, Maud Amery was not one of these, but she had been roused to a far stronger sympathy with the misfortunes of Gerald Warburton than she would have felt, had he not been a young and handsome man. She would very gladly have remained at home, for she did not even take the indolent pleasure, usual in the gay scene by which she was surrounded, and she very willingly strolled with Alice downed the dim walk feebly lighted by the little coloured lamps hung sparingly among the branches, and by the light of the moon which here and there peered through the fantastic twirl, and chequered the ground with streaks of silver.

Both sisters were silent, the thoughts of Maud were away from that scene of wild revelry, for the crash of the music, the suppressed moan of filial anguish smote her ear, one silent sorrowful figure took the place of the gaily habited masqueraders, she heard only the mournful mellow voice of Gerald Warburton, she saw only his grave pale countenance, his dignified form bending over his mother's bier.

Alice was equally silent. She was beginning to ask herself what might be the possible end of her, as she called it, innocent flirtation with the Prince.

Alice was not corrupt; nor had she any intention of becoming so. She had not yet learned to persuade herself that the paramour of a Prince is less infamous than the wanton of a private gentleman.

Extraordinary, too, as the idiosyncrasy may appear, Alice still loved Sir Miles Cressingham.

She had recognised him in the magnificent habit of a Spanish cavalier, and she wanted to parade before him her royal coquette.

The sisters had measured the length of the long dark walk, and were returning to the illuminated portion of the gardens, when two male maskers approached them, in one of whom Alice recognised the red domino.

"Lovely Alice," whispered the Prince, as, taking the lady's hand, he drew her gently again down the long walk, "what a happiness it would be if we could dismiss, with waving of an enchanted wand, all this scene of noise and folly, and transport ourselves to some fairy island, where love and joy should reign with us for ever!"

"I fear," whispered Alice, "your Royal Highness would, in such a case, soon weary of my poor company, and wish yourself back in your worldly dominions."

"No dominion, sweet Alice, like that of a young faithful heart," replied the Prince. Then, dropping his voice still lower, he murmured, "Alice, sweet adorable Alice, you know—who does not?—how unhappy are my domestic relations. Be that to me, in some sweet cottage, what the world has denied to me in a palace—my love, my life, my wife—in all save the vile ceremony for which a true heart cares so little."

Alice trembled, and made no reply. Though she had neither the pure mind nor the correct principles of her sisters Florence and Ellinor, she was not yet corrupted, and she had too much sense to permit herself to be the dupe of those sneers at marriage—the sole security of woman—which are so common on the lips of immoral men, in all stations of life.

Further down the dark walk Alice was insensibly led by the Prince; he whispered in a still lower tone, but he grew bolder in the naming his bad purpose—

"A cottage a short distance from London, a house in town, if she wished it, jewels, carriages, all that the love of man and the wealth of the world could give, and a heart tender, devoted, constant; her's only, and she to be the refuge, the sweet consoler of the princely lover wearied with the cares of state."

Brilliant promises were these from a man still comparatively young, handsome, and accomplished, and withal a Prince—"the expectancy," if not "the roee," of the fair state.'

A firmer and less luxurious nature than that of Alice Amery might have been tempted to these offers.

But Alice still resisted the temptation, the glowing words, that would almost have persuaded her that vice was virtue, that instead of becoming the paid wanton of a profligate Prince, it was offered to her to bind up a wounded heart, to sooth an aching head, to be a sweet

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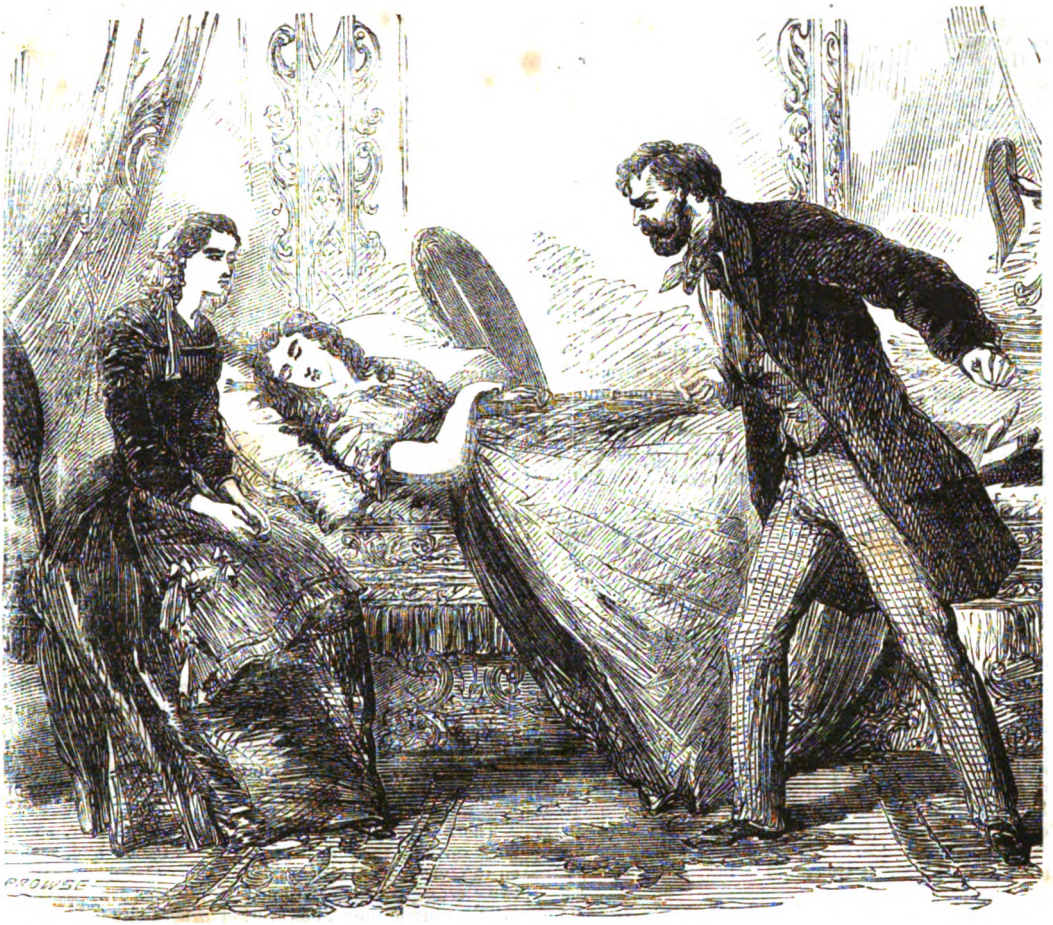

THE ARRIVAL OF SIR MILES CRESSINGHAM.

consoler of one who was unfortunate in the wife which the law had appointed him, and who would make her the wife of his heart and his soul.

If Alice murmured a tolerably firm denial to these subtle speeches, it was, perhaps, her sense of honour, rather than her infatuation for Sir Miles Cressingham, that saved her. She shook off the hand of the Prince, in half-affected anger—protested that she would not be so wicked, and spoke of rejoining Lady Fitzwalter and her sisters.

Alice knew that Sir Miles Cressingham was with Lady Fitzwalter; and she thought to pique his vanity, if she could not alarm his love, by showing him that she whom he had neglected could be the chosen of a Prince.

The Regent had no suspicion that the heart of Alice was already occupied. He would have desisted from pressing her had he thought her capable of attachment to a man whom he thought, without uniting the grandeur of his social position, was every way inferior to himself.

He supposed the whim of Alice for rejoining Lady Fitzwalter and her sisters was one of those caprices in which a pretty woman must be indulged. In their way back to the more crowded portion of the gardens, however, he ventured, half-jestingly, to tell her that he had a carriage waiting at a private entrance, and that he had hoped she would go with him as far as Wimbledon, to see the villa which he had purchased there.

"Do come with me, sweet Alice," he said. "We shall not be absent more than an hour and a-half; and can return here in time for supper, which is not to be served till two o'clock."

Alice, however, refused to grant this request, in the same half-jesting tone in which it was made, and approached the dancing groups, loitering near which she recognised Lady Fitzwalter by her ruff, and farthingale, and regal diadem.

She did not perceive that when she and the Prince entered the lightest portion of the gardens, they still left the mask, who had accompanied the Regent, and her sister Maud in the dim duskily illuminated walk.

Laughing and gaily jesting with the Prince, Alice approached Lady Fitzwalter. Her ladyship had separated herself from the groups assembled about the dancers—among whom were Adeline and Clara—and was walking slowly (with a meditative air as little suited to the festive scene as it was like her customary manner) towards the dim avenue from which the Prince and Alice had just emerged.

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The Regent had flattered himself that Alice Amery would readily have accompanied him to the villa at Wimbledon; and was somewhat provoked and disappointed at her refusal, which, in his own mind, he termed squeamish prudery, but which was, in fact, the last remnant of modesty and womanly honour.

His Royal Highness, however, had a supreme confidence in a vile complicity on the part of Lady Fitzwalter; and, still retaining the arm of Alice, which he had drawn through his own, he stept up to Lady Fitzwalter, and said:

"I have been requesting Miss Amery, my dear madam, to leave this noisy scene for an hour, and drive with me to Wimbledon. Will you kindly become her chaperone?"

Lady Fitzwalter paused at the sound of the Prince's voice; and Alice remembered afterwards that her figure became suddenly fixed and rigid, and her eyes assumed a ghastly expression, as they glared through the apertures in her mask.

Her utterance, too, was spasmodic, as she gasped out:

"Your Royal Highness honours me with your commands. Get my coach ready. The King commands. I am coming—I am coming."

A kind of hysterical shriek accompanied the last words. Lady Fitzwalter put up her hand, as if to remove her mask. Then, with another horrible cry, she fell motionless at the Prince's feet.

The attendants and the maskers crowded forwards. They raised up the prostrate woman; they cut the strings of her mask; and then, in the glare of the lamps, with the gorgeous regal attire, and the rouge upon the cheek, making hideous contrast to the glazed eyes, they looked upon the face of death.

Lady Fitzwalter had been indeed called. The summons of that King whom no mortal disobeys had gone forth. She was dead!

The revellers who had gathered round shrunk back in horror. Some few were so impressed by the horrors of such a death that they withdrew from the wild orgies, and carried home with them some earnest and solemn thoughts. Others, and they were the majority, only hurried away from the spot, or told the attendants to be quick in removing the corpse, and actually were angry with the dead woman for spoiling their amusement, as if she had died at that time, and in that place, out of pure perversity.

Of this last number, perhaps, the Regent was one; for, with an exclamation of horror, when it was discovered that Lady Fitzwalter was really dead, he drew the half-fainting Alice from the scene of the catastrophe, and, without any demur or resistance on her part, placed her in the private carriage which he had had in waiting during the evening, and conveyed her to his villa at Wimbledon.

The corpse of Lady Fitzwalter was carried from the gardens to the house of the nearest medical man; but life was found to be quite extinct.

So there the corpse lay—stark and cold; and the wild round of the masquerade went on, till the lights of the lamps looked garish in the pure rays of the morning.

The two unfortunate girls, Clara and Adeline Amery, vainly traversed the gardens in search of their sisters, Maud and Alice; and, accidentally encountering Lord Annesley among the maskers, were fain to accept the loan of his carriage to convey them to the villa of the deceased Lady Fitzwalter—her coach being left at the gardens, in case of the appearance of the missing ladies.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RESCUE OF MICHAEL, THE GIPSEY.

THE numerous and efficient body of constables now known under the common term of police did not exist eighty years ago. Beadles, who combined the duties of a constable with those of wearing a cocked-hat, and rapping the heads of riotous little boys at church on Sundays with a long cane, were the chief domestic guardians of the peace.

The Bow-street officer was the man called for on all serious occasions.

The unfortunate gipsey, Michael, had been imprisoned in the round-house at Epping when charged with the murder of the old butler, Hodson.

His companion, the man Abraham, who had, by accident, dropped the knife which Michael had so unfortunately left him in the struggle attendant on the carrying off of Florence, had, after the murder, secreted himself with Blustering Bill.

The inquest was summoned for the following day; and, in the interim, Michael, whose guilt was assumed by the populace, was lodged in the round-house, where, during the day, he was subjected to the supervision of sundry boys, of inquiring dispositions, who climbed up to the grating of the casement of the little room, or rather cell, in which he was confined, in order to feast their eyes with a look at the supposed murderer.

At night a couple of farm labourers, specially employed as constables on this occasion, were appointed as sentries outside the round-house; for the gipsies were regarded as desperate characters, and Mr. Dobbins, the worthy beadle, was afraid of an attempt to rescue his prisoner.

The good man held a high opinion of his own zeal and abilities; and contemplated, as the height of glory, abandoning his present staff of office, and limited duties, in the little town of Epping, for the more distinguished insignia and larger sphere of action peculiar to the Bow-street detective.

It was a lovely summer night. The wind, which had raved so fiercely, had now scarce a breath to stir the leaves of the forest; and the moon, sailing through a cloudless sky, had a light like that of day.

Hodge and Ralph, the two farming men, were getting a little tired of the duty they had undertaken.

These poor fellows were accustomed to rise before the dawn, and to go to bed at sunset; and they were most unmistakeably and stupidly sleepy.

To keep themselves awake, as they said, they had brought from the nearest ale-house a huge can of ale. They had also the half of a peck-loaf, and a huge piece of bacon.

The operation of eating and drinking, however, so far from reviving their faculties, confused them; and, seated on the ground, on either side of the round-house, those two alert sentries began to nod upon their post.

The consciousness, however, of a necessity for keeping awake will make the heaviest sleeper restless, and easily disturbed; and thus it was that, at the approaching rumble of cart wheels, the countrymen started to their feet.

"Od dang it!" said Hodge—"it be only a hay-cart. Ding me! but a thought it were some of the gipsey class."

"So did I," answered his companion; "and, ecod! I doan't half like this job, Hodge. I wish I were comfortable in my bed. Whoy, we were as good go for sogers at once, and have a fine red coat to wear, as stand here all noight, and nothin' to get by it, but a shilling a-piece from Measter Dobbins."

By this time the hay-cart which had disturbed these vigilant sentinels rumbled up.

It was driven by a burly rough-looking man, clad in a smock-frock. A few loose trusses of straw lay in the cart—on one of which was apparently sleeping a lad of about fifteen years of age, clad, like the driver, in the canvass-frock and straw-hat of a waggoner.

"Hoa, friend!" cried Hodge, hailing the driver. "Be thee coom from Lunnon? What's the news there? It's a pretty business we have here to-night."

"Little news in London," answered the man. "They did say yesterday as Boney had landed; and his sogers, a-marching through Kent, had kissed all the lasses, and roasted six little children. But I guess it were all a lie; 'cos I has a sister down near Gravesend, and she'd have com'd up to London when the French first landed."

"Oh! it's a deal worser nor French as we have had

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here," answered Hodge. "The most horriblest murder as ever were committed. Done by a gipsey fellow here, on borders of the forest. A poor old man it were he killed. I knowed as he killed; 'cos I saw'd him lying in his gore. So it is certain that ere gipsey villin killed him. But, dash my buttons! what else were to be expected from a gipsey—such murdering thieves and vagabonds as they are? And, in course, this fellow has got worse, because there were farmer Ashfield and farmer Johnson have been a-talking of giving him work along of such as we. I wouldn't have worked on seame farm as gipsey vagabond; but I thinks as how farmers will have enough of he now."

"Noa; why you doan't say so—do 'ee?" said the man in the cart, who had listened very patiently to the outburst of Mr. Hodge's jealousy of, and aversion to, poor Michael. "Ye doan't mean to say now that farmers would go to give work to a gipsey vagabond when there were such tight honest lads as you to be had?"

"Ecod! I do though," answered Hodge. "Coom down, if thee's gotten a minute to spare, and have a swig o' this here ale. It's jolly stuff; and old Dobbins the beadle pays; so Ralph and I made up our minds for a go in."

"Oh! I'll take a drink, and thank you, friend," answered the stranger. "Here, you young shaver," he shouted to the boy—"wake up, and take the reins, while I get down to take a drink with these here gentlemen!"

The boy rose, and, rubbing his eyes, took the reins, in an idle unwilling manner. The man got down, and, taking a drink of ale from the can, which Hodge offered he said:

"That's rale good stuff—that is. And so the farmers here away have been after giving work to the gipsey—has they? Oh! masters is a pesky rascally lot—they is. There's my master lives ten miles further on, at the Tilson farm. I have been to fetch this here cart and horse for him; and I warrant he'll ding me right and left 'cause I warn't home by sunset. I stopped a bit on the spree—so I don't deceive you; and if I gets back by sunrise, he may count hisself well off. I thinks as masters ought to be put down a bit—I do. That's what the French has done; and it would not be amiss here aways, I'm thinking."

Hodge shook his head.

"Ecod!" he said—"I'd be main glad to get rid of my measter; but if there were no measters ther'd be no wages; and how would we do that way?"

"Why, the masters' money would be all given, to be sure," returned the man of the hay-cart. "It would be knock head; take pig: this here gallon of ale would be called a pint; and a peck-loaf sell for twopence."

"Sure, but would it now?" exclaimed Hodge, enchanted at this radical Utopia. "Gad! it would be jolly to have a gallon of ale called a quart. "Here's hoping they'll come afore Christmas."

As the rustic spoke, he raised the can to his lips, and, in his deep potation, did not observe that another man had quietly slipped from the cart, where he had lain concealed under some trusses of straw, and, with a noiseless step, crept behind his comrade Ralph, who had stood, with open mouth and ears, gaping with stupid astonishment at the doctrines propounded by the stranger.

At the same moment the new comer seized the arms of Ralph from behind; and the liberal politician tipped up the can of ale, and, while Hodge, blinded and half-choked, spluttered and stamped, he snatched a stout rope which his companion threw him, and bound and knotted it round the poor countryman with a speed and dexterity worthy of a seaman.

The worthy sentinels and guardians of the prisoner Michael were in two minutes laid side by side, bound hand and foot, and with a wisp of straw tied across their mouths, which not only effectually prevented their giving any alarm, but interfered, in a very disagreeable manner, with the natural operation of drawing their breath.

"Now, you Reuben—here!" exclaimed the pretended countryman who had driven the hay-cart. "Quick—jump up! If so be as these here chaps hasn't the keys of the lock-up about 'em, we must put you in at the winder."

Red Reuben, who had accompanied Gentleman Harry and Blustering Bill on their expedition for the release of the gipsey Michael, accused of the murder which Blustering Bill had committed, scrambled out of the cart at their summons, and crept, shivering and crying, to the door of the round-house, in front of which lay the two pinioned men, whose pockets Bill was searching for the keys.

"I doesn't mind what I do for Michael," sobbed poor Reuben. "Michael has been very kind to poor Reuben—he has; but I don't like getting in at a winder. There's big black men in at the winders, to knock poor Reuben down, and kill him."

"Od rot you for a snivelling coward!" said the ruffian Bill. "Here is the keys, all right, and no thanks to you. Just go and hold the horse's head; and I and Harry here will have Michael out in a jiffy."

As Blustering Bill spoke he dragged a huge key from the pocket of the sapient Hodge, which readily turned in the door of the round-house.

The worthy jailors of the accused gipsey, though the could neither move nor speak, could both see and hear; and great was the indignation which their looks testified as they rolled their heads from side to side, and their red cheeks grew purple, and they glared at their captors as fiercely as was possible to a quartette of fishy light-blue eyes.

Blustering Bill laughed.

"Ain't the yokels in a rage!" he said. "Sarve 'em right, for talking agin the institutions of this ere blessed country. They shouldn't have gone for to talk agin their masters. They'll know better another time."

"They'll never know nothin' agin if you doesn't loosen them ere necklaces as you have given 'em," said Gentleman Harry. "Hang it! Bill, does you want to follow up smashing the poor old feller last night with strangling them two poor devils to-night?"

"Don't go for to be throwing of the old man's smashed head in my face," returned Bill, savagely; "yer know as it were a hacceident—it were. Blowed, if I wouldn't chop off my right hand—I would—to bring the old man to life agin! Curse the old fool!—why did he come atwixt me and the gal? He would put his blood on my hand—he would do it; and never a drop o' human blood stained the hand of Bill afore: and does yer think I'm agoing to let that ere poor chap, what have got his wife and his kids, be scragged for my blunder? Not if I sent twenty yokels after the old man. Yer don't know me, Harry—yer doesn't know me, if yer thinks sich a thing."

As the man spoke, he forced open the door of the round-house, and discovered the gipsey Michael seated on the floor, on some straw which had been thrown for his bed. His hands and feet were ironed; and a jug of water, and an untasted loaf, stood near the pillow of straw.

God bless you Bill," exclaimed the poor wretch, tarting up on the man's entrance, and staggering towards him, as well as his manacled limbs would permit.

"I thought as you would'nt have come Bill, I thought you would'nt. Poor Abby, poor little ones, no cottage, no farmer Ashfield's ground for em now. But you would'nt let their father be strung up Bill, you would'nt."

Bill invoked an anathema on his eyes and limbs, referring to his fidelity to the gipsy, and he said—

"Cheer up Micheal, cheer up, I am mortal sorry thee has got into trouble on my account, but we must e'en make the best of a bad bargain and get thee off to another part of the country; come along man, come along, here wrap these hay bands round the fetters, we cannot stay to file them now, we have not a minute to lose, and must get them off when we are safe in the forest."

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Blustering Bill hurried the gipsy out of the prison, and helped him into the cart to the exurberant delight of Red Reuben, with whom Michael and his family were next in consideration to Snowdrop.

"What shall we do with them here jokers Bill?" inquired Gentleman Harry, "they are fit to bust themselves atwixt rage and want of breath; suppose as we locks 'em up in poor Mike's place."

"An uncommon good thought Harry," answered Blustering Bill, "bundle 'em in; there my covys," he said, as he helped Harry hand the two farm labourers into the round house, "sorry to be imperlite, and not give you a little more air, but you see there's room and enough for you to breathe, and it would'nt altogether suit my politics for you to set up a cry for liberty just now, cause you see I'm like most o'them radicals, I thinks liberty such a good thing that I likes to keep it all to myself."

Poor Hodge glared at Blustering Bill, the rage which he had been deprived of the power to utter, but Blustering Bill only laughed, and as he laid the two countrymen with his companion's help, on the straw, which had been given to Micheal as a bed, he recommended them to take a comfortable snooze.

"The best thing you can possibly do my lads," he said, "seeing as not nobody will come to disturb you, as I am a going to lock you both up with this here key as you turned upon my friend here: tit for tat you know, all the world over; a nap will do you good arter all that ale you've been a drinking, and a ride in the fresh air will be good for my friend."

With these words he quitted the prison, locking the door behind him and securing the clever sentries for five or six hours, as no one, save a chance way farer would approach the cage till daybreak, and long before that time he hoped to have Michael safe from the pursuit.

"Well Michael," he exclaimed, as jumping into the cart, he gave the horse a lash with the whip, and it set off at full speed. "I wish Lady Silverside yonder would douse her glim, she's done us good service up to this time, and now the sooner she puts on her black mask the better; cheer up Mike, your wife and kids are a waiting for you at the chalk pits, I shall take you all straight to old Stedman's and before sunrise we'll have you down the Thames in a tight little smuggling craft."

"Thee does the best thee can Bill, and I thank thee, I thank thee," said the gipsy, but his voice had a bitterness which he could not control, and as he bent his head down over his manacled hands, the tears started from his eyes as he thought of his ruined prospects, of the pleasant home which he had hoped with his honest industry to secure to his wife and children, and which was now lost to him for ever.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A HAREM IN ENGLAND.—FLASH CARRY AND THE MALAY.—MAN'S LOVE AND WOMAN'S HATRED.

THE scene was an apartment fitted up with a fantastic luxury.

The walls hung with purple silk heavily fringed and looped with gold.

Silk carpets were spread upon the floor. A chandelier, the drops of which glittered like diamonds in the light of the hundred wax tapers that burned in it, depended from the ceiling, which was white and gold.

A mixture of Oriental and European fashions was remarkable in that gorgeously appointed chamber.

There were tables and chairs of satin wood, the creamy-tinted veining of which contrasted richly which the purple of the massive draperies, and there was a long low divan piled with soft cushions, where a Cashmere shawl, and a veil of gold tissue thrown carelessly aside, might have indicated the habitation of an Indian female.

In a curiously wrought vase of silver, perfumes were burning, the thin blue vapour that curled up from it was laden with the odour of frankincense, aloes, and myrrh.

The table was spread for a delicate collation.

The vineyards of France, Germany, Spain, and Hungary had yielded the various aroma of their wine yards to fill the crystal decanters with delicious wines.

There was a dish of small birds roasted and served, while there were savoury pies, and caviare and olives.

The East and West had been tasked to fill those baskets of exquisitely painted porcelain with the fruits that blushed from amid the fresh-gathered vine leaves that embedded them.

There was the golden-tinted kingly pine apple, then a luxury found only on the tables of the rich; there were white and purple grapes from the coast of Valencia, with delicate bloom untouched upon their smiling clusters, there were strawberriers fresh gathered and fragrant, mixed in a silver dish with sugar and cream; there were scarlet cherries, and the homely but grateful red and white currant.

Over a lamp of burning spirits simmered in a silver vessel some of the finest Mocha coffee, its odour mingling with that which strained up from a richly chased teapot of burnished gold.

Moss roses, dappled pinks, white lilies, and scarlet geraniums mixed their odours with those of the myrrh and frankincense, and the atmosphere of the chamber was heavy and sickly with perfumes.

No fresh air from without ever reached this gorgeous apartment; there was no skylight or window of any sort, for it was a subterranean vault which jealousy had converted into a gilded prison for its victim. Literally gilded, for at one end of the chamber was a kind of archway covered by a strong grating, the bars of which were gilded. Athwart this grating a purple curtain was drawn on the outer side.

Opposite to this archway was another, athwart which a curtain only was suspended.

There was no night, no day, in that gorgeous abode; days and nights, weeks and months, rolled over in the dull round of insipid, cheerless luxury.

Presently the curtain of purple silk was drawn aside from the inner archway, and discovered another apartment fitted up as a bed-chamber, in a style of luxury similar to that which prevailed in the other one.

A lady entered from the bed-chamber. She was habited in a kind of semi-oriental style that well became the voluptuous character of her beauty.

Over a garment of peach-coloured princely brocade, wrought with silver, she wore a loose drapery of gold muslin, that gorgeous product of the East which fashion lately become mean in her fancies, now pronounces out of taste.

A turban of scarlet and gold, with a bird of paradise plume, and an agriette of diamonds, well contrasted with the lady's yellow hair, which fell from beneath it in long natural ringlets.

The magnificent girdle which clasped her waist was of emeralds and diamonds, and emeralds and diamonds glittered on her white neck, and encircled her finely moulded arms.

In that artificial radiance, and in her glorious attire, the lady appeared superbly beautiful, but in the purer light of day it would have been seen that her white skin had assumed a somewhat chalky tint, that there was hectic in the bright rose leaf tint glowed in the centre of the cheek, and that the voluptuous form was somewhat wasted.

The lady lounged wearily into the outer room, and flung herself listlessly on the soft silken cushion of the divan.

She glanced round the magnificent chamber and then at her own glittering garments, then she burst into a hollow bitter laugh, a laugh that had in it the misery of groans and fears, then she sighed heavily and tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Oh how weary I am of all this, how weary I am," she exclaimed, "how sick of fine clothes and dainty food. What's the use of jewels, or any of the sort of these beautiful things, when one can neither show them off to those one don't like, or give a share in them to those one

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loves. I am sick of all this, I hate my life, and I hate him who makes me lead such a life, he shuts me up in a prison—a prison!"

As she uttered the last words the woman glared with loathing round the splendid room, the bare walls of Newgate would never have been more distasteful to her.

"I wonder how long I have been shut up here," she resumed with a weary sigh, "I cannot count the days and nights, there are neither days or nights for me now. One might as well be dead and buried, oh how I am buried, buried alive. Oh, I should be happier if I were dead, ha, ha, he would not want to clasp me then, he would not make me shudder with his hateful kisses. Once I asked only for wealth, for riches, and thought they would make me happy. Am I happy, I—oh no I am miserable, I was happier when I traversed the streets all day, and knew not where to find a bed at night. I am afraid of this man, is he a man or a devil, he looks so like a cunning dreadful fiend, when he comes creeping in, and sits down to glare at me with them burning eyes of his. He says that news has come that he is now a prince in his own land, and tells me he will carry me there, I am helpless in his hands, for I have not courage to take away my life. I have thought of it often, but I have not the courage."

As the miserable woman spoke she took a gold hafted knife from the table, raised it, looked at it with a shudder, and then laid it down again.

At that moment a clear musical sound was heard as though from a stroke on a silver bell, and Caroline Andrews, for she was the imprisoned beauty, shrunk and turned ghastly pale, as the gilded grating opened to admit her terrific lover, the Lascar Hamet.

He closed the grating as soon as he had entered, and then approaching the woman he fell at her feet, in the fashion of an Eastern land, kissing the very hem of her garment.

"Lotus face, queen tulip in the garden of beauty, radiant as the evening star, and more lovely than the moonbeams," said Hamet, addressing his mistress in the hyperbole of his race.

"Look up, speak one kind word to him who knows no light, save in the sunshine of thine eyes."

"Let me free if you wish me to love you," answered Caroline, "it is not the fashion of my country to imprison a woman because she is beloved.

"Then the men of your country are fools, Caroline, fools!" returned the Malay, fiercely, "does the jeweller give leave to each passer by to handle his rubies and pearls, or the merchant pour forth his gold for each pauper's fingers to grasp it? Ha, ha, you ask why I imprison you, Caroline. Because I love love: because no eyes save my own shall feed upon the lustre of my pearl: because I am a miser, to count over my gold in secret. Why should you not live like the women of my country, eye of none save that of father, brother, or husband gazes not on their beuty."

"So you think," answered Carry with a bitter sneer, "the worst way to keep a woman true to you is to suspect her. She will be apt to think it best to give you a cause for your jealousy. I should, I can tell you. What is the use of the fine things you give me when I am a prisoner? You say that you love me, Hamet, I will hate you—hate you. I am learning already to hate you for the love which robs me of my liberty."

"And what you call your liberty you shall never have again," answered the fierce Oriental. "I will sooner see you dead. I will kill you with my own hand. I will give you a prison that shall keep you seven years lying ere a Yengeese lover makes you his."

"It would not be the first murder you have committed," returned Caroline; "the men of the law may catch you, and you may be hanged yet for the murder of my poor friend. Oh, poor Jane—poor Jane, and poor Snowdrop! My little Snowdrop, shall I never, never see you?"

The poor woman wept and wrang her hands as she thought of those two whom she had so loved and lost. Then she turned her blue eyes on Hamet, with burning hatred flashing through her tears.

"You say that you love me?" she exclaimed. "understand that I hate you—I hate you. Your kiss is more odious to me than to be twined in the slimy folds of the great snakes you have told me of. I sicken at the sight of you. I would sooner look upon tho visage of a fiend than on yours. You are a fiend—a cruel, cunning fiend in human shape. Age, decreptitude, ugliness, are less detestable than you are. Your absence would, for me, convert hell into Paradise; your presence would make a hell of heaven! Oh, leave me monster, murderer! Would that I were blind and deaf so that I might neither see nor hear you. Mark me too, the riches of which you bosst will not save you from the laws of this country, I may, perhaps win my freedom in spite of you, and then, monster that you are, you shall answer with your own life for that of Crazy Jane. I would give you up to the hangman, I would, and I tell you the love you profess for me is a feather's weight in compare with a ton of iron, to the hatred which I bear to you."

As she ceased speaking, the excited woman threw herself back on the divan, covering her face with her hands nor would she look up again that evening or answer the abject protestations of the man, who threw himself at her feet, pressed the hem of her garment to his lips, wetted with his tears, and spoke not one word of resentment to all the bitter things which she had said.

Such were the scenes in which the life of Flash Carry was now passed. She was an absolute prisoner, unknowing even the locality of her gorgeous subterranean abode to which she had been conveyed by her strange lover, ere she had overcome the effects of the opiate which he had administered to her at her lodgings on the night she had parted with little Snowdrop.

The man's passion for Caroline was an insanity—a raving madness; and strange to say, her scorn and hatred only added fuel to the flame.

Had Caroline at any time shown a return of the Malay's passionate love, it would probably have cooled into indifference.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LONE HOUSE ON THE BLACKWATER.—THE OLD SERVANT—POOR FORLORN FLORENCE.—THE SUPPER IN THE SERVANT'S HALL.—THE TWO PICTURES IN THE YELLOW CHAMBER.

THE ponderous gates of the house on the Blackwater were opened by an ancient servant to admit the carriage containing Florence and her abductors.

The vehicle rolled heavily over a courtyard grown with tall grass, nightshade, and nettles, and when on descending from it, the party entered a huge hall that occupied sufficient space for the whole of a modern London home, Florence and Lady Bess shivered alike with cold and the depression of spirits caused by that dreary place.

The Spider, equally affected by the cold, and perhaps a little awed by the gloomy grandeur of that immense hall, with its paving of black and white marble, its massive stone pillars and long dusky casements on either side of the massive oaken deors, uttered a savage oath, and rudely asked the old man who had admitted the party whether he had not a fire, and some more comfortable place than the hall to receive the visitors in.

The old man, whose name it appeared was Maynard, bent a pair of keen grey eyes earnestly on the illfavoured countenance of the Spider, and answered coldly that a fire was ready for the lady, in one of the best chambers, whither he would at once conduct her and the young woman her attendant.

"You, my friend," he concluded, "can sup with the postillions, in the servant's hall."

"The servant's hall!" cried the Spider, "does yer think as a gentleman is used to sitting down along of servants?"

"No," replied Maynard, with a sneer, "of course I don't; but you are not a gentleman, and the place that is good enough for me is not below you, I reckon."

The Spider would willingly have answered this insult to his dignity with a blow, but he was slightly-limbed and

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of diminutive stature. Old Maynard, though perhaps thirty years his senior, was at least six feet in height, wiry, and strongly built. Mr. Jenkins, the Spider, would have had little chance in a hand to hand contest with him, so being a coward as well as a brute, he put the affront in his pocket and stood silent and sulky while the old man went to fetch a light, for the evening shades which were so rapidly descending without, closed darkly in the large and gloomy hall.

An oath and an impatient stamp of the foot from the Spider, alone broke the silence till the steps of old Maynard, were again heard echoing along the vaulted stone passage by which he had quitted the hall.

He carried two lamps, one of which he proffered to the Spider.

"You can find your way along that passage," he said, pointing to the one he had quitted, "and if you turn to the left you will come into the little hall; there is a good fire, and the postillions have come in from the stables; and as soon as I have shown the lady to her room I will join you, and we will have supper."

"Many thanks; I am greatly obligated to you, no doubt, old fellow," snarled Mr. Jenkins; "but as this here young lady have been trusted to me as my prisoner like, in course I must see her room, that it's all safe, and she won't have no chance of getting away."

"Oh, as you like; come along, come along," answered Maynard: "you shall judge for yourself what a tidy chance the young lady will have of getting away. Ha, ha, ha,—ho, ho, ho, get away to be sure; a pretty woman escape from the doomed house of Blackwater—escape from the last of the red-handed Cressinghams—the wife-killing Cressinghams. Ha, ha, ha—ho, ho, ho!"

The old man seemed infinitely amused at the idea of poor Florence effecting her escape, his greenish grey eyes glittered, and his withered parchment-hued face puckered into a thousand wrinkles, and looked wierd and elritch in the red smoky glare of the lamp as it swayed in the wind that whistled and moaned through the long passage, and up the wide staircase to which he led the way.

Strange and uncouth guides and companions were these for the fair and innocent Florence, these two wild-looking men, and the bold, frail woman, who with her customary audacity somewhat checked by the gloom of the lone house, kept close by the side of Florence.

Up that wide oaken staircase, over which six horses might have been driven abreast, along a broad gallery from the walls of which portraits of the dead and gone Cressinghams looked grimly, as through a mist, in the feeble rays of the two pale lamps, which broke without dispersing the darkness, just then the old man threw open the door of an apartment which he called the yellow chamber.

The room, however, had none of the cheerfulness of appointment which Lady Bess had associated with the mention of that gay colour; and as old Maynard set down the lamp, she exclaimed in a petulant tone—

"So you calls this the yellow chamber, old chap; I think the black chamber would be more befitting to it."

There was considerable truth in this observation of Lady Bess.

Age, dust, and damp, had bleached the once brilliant and showy cushions to a dirty straw colour.

The room was spacious: at one side were two large windows, at the other a pair of folding doors opening into a bed-chamber. The walls were wainscoated with oak, of which wood, darkened to blackness by the flight of time, the furniture also consisted.

Some attempt to render both apartments comfortable had been made by old Maynard; a large fire blazed upon the iron dogs that stood in the spacious fireplaces, both of sitting-room and bed-room, the tables and chairs had been dusted, bed and table linen were placed to air near the hearth in the bed-chamber, the door of a huge winged wardrobe of carved oak stood open, and two large trunks which also stood there, were, old Maynard informed her, filled with wearing apparel which Sir Miles had sent down a fortnight before.

Poor Florence felt her heart sink at this arrangement; how very secure Sir Miles must feel in his villiany, that he did not even think it necessary to veil it with even the most flimsy pretence.

"If you will inspect your mistress's things," said old Maynard, setting down the lamp he carried, "I will fetch something for her supper, then you can come down to the little hall and have your own afterwards."

"And where am I to sleep?" inquired Lady Bess, to whom the man's observation had been addressed.

"There's a closet in your lady's room," answered Maynard. "I have put up a bed which used to stand there for the nurse, when the lady of Sir Marmaduke Cressingham, Sir Miles's uncle, was dying of the poison he gave her."

"What!" exclaimed Lady Bess, all the shrewishness of her disposition toned by her superstition. "Do you think, you old fool and wretch that me and the young lady is going to sleep in a horrid room where murder, and dead people, and all sorts of things have been."

"Ha, ha, ha—ho, ho, ho," exclaimed old Maynard, again indulging in that extraordinary laugh which more resembled the voice of a raven in a good humour than any human sound. "Ha, ha, ha—sleep my darling—Oh, no, I don't expect that you will. Who has been able to sleep, who has ever slept in the yellow chamber of the dark house of Blackwater? You won't sleep, my dear, but you will dream—you will dream, and that will do as well."

"Dream or no dream, I won't stay in this place. I don't like it," said Lady Bess.

"You're a pretty girl, my dear, that you are, now," said Maynard, pausing as he stirred the fire to take a survey of Lady Bess, "but you must learn, my dear, that though a pretty face has brought many a maid and matron too into the dark house of the Cressinghams on the Blackwater, it never helped one of them out of it, or set her will against that of the head of the Cressinghams. Sir Miles gave orders that I should prepare the yellow chambers for the lady and her maid, my dear, and I have done so, and here you must stay whether you like it or no."

The Spider meanwhile, who, as he was not to inhabit it himself, cared little about the dismal appearance of the yellow chamber, had been examining the fastenings, and its general capabilities as a prison house.

The massive lock on the heavy oaken door would defy a woman's feeble strength to force it open. The roar of water struck the Spider's ear as he approached the windows, and through the blackness of the night he beheld the shimmer of the white foam on the waters, as the river, dashing over the rocks that formed a cascade beheath the walls of the lone mansion, hurried on its seething waves to join the expanse of the broad ocean beyond.

"Seems to me," said the Spider, approaching Lady Bess after he had finished his inspection, "that these rooms are the real downright cage for our little canary here. Nonsense of your talking, Lady Bess, as you don't like it; you likes the coin the guv'nor gives you for the service, I reckons. You see, my dear, I does'nt like being away from my old ooman, though I does give her a lick now and agin when she le's her tongue go too fast, and you doesn't like being away from Gentleman Harry, tho' for the matter of that, a better chap nor he you might get any day, my dear. But them as gets the kicks gets the halfpence, and we puts up with the bitters for the sake of the sweets. So just comfort yourself with the thought of how soon you'll see Gentleman Harry again, and what a jolly lot of chirruping goldfinches you'll have to pour into his pocket, which, without meaning any offence, my dear, I think as you might dispose of much better. Now I tells you what you has to do, Lady Bess; think all this here over, whilst I goes down to supper with this here respectable gent."

The Spider nodded his head and winked his eye at Lady Bess with a most villainous expression as he said this.

He was taking change from the young woman for the contempt with which she had treated him on the journey.

The love of such a wretch as the Spider, if the name of that divine passion is not defiled by being mentioned with

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reference to the fancies and imaginations of such a being, the love of this man was a strange mixture of physical attractions and downright hatred.

He loved and hated Lady Bess at the same time, and her future, at his hands, was more threatening than ever was that of his despised and ill-treated wife.

"Good bye, my dear," he said, as he followed the man Maynard out of the room, "you can come down to us a bit by-and-bye afore you goes to bed, and I am sure as neither you nor the young lady has any rights to grumble, for these here rooms is fit for a queen, leastways, when she is in prison, as one may say."

The Spider closed this speech with a laugh, and the two girls heard the door bolted on them on the outside.

The dislike which Lady Bess had expressed to the aforesaid apartments, together with her general demeanour of respect and almost kindness to herself, encouraged Florence to hope that after all she would not be very strict in her allegiance to her infamous employer; but the fury which the young woman expressed at the taunts of the Spider, awakened in poor Florence almost as much fear as that which she felt towards her male abductors.

Lady Bess clenched her fist, she stormed and stamped, she shrieked at the door for release, and made frantic efforts to force the fastenings.

Finding all her efforts unavailing, she suddenly passed from a paroxysm of rage to a mood of apparent good humour, and turning to Florence, she said—

"I will be even with that villain for locking me up here, if its seven years hence he shall repent of his insolence, And now let us look about the place where it seems we are to be shut up."

As Lady Bess spoke she took up one of the lamps, and parading the two rooms amused herself with jests upon the strange old fashioned furniture, comparing the huge bed in which Florence was to sleep to a hearse, and the closet set apart for herself to a funeral vault.

The comparison was not right.

Nothing could be more dreary in its stateliness than the immense bed, with its curtains of black and yellow damask, and the nodding plumes of black feathers at the four corners of the tester.

The closet within the chamber assigned to Lady Bess, was as big as a modern built bed-room, it was wainscotted oak, and lighted only from the bed-chamber by a few squares of glass let into the wainscot, and was a dismal looking place enough.

On the walls, both of the sitting-room and bed-room were hung various pictures, mostly portraits.

Of these paintings, three in particular attracted the attention both of Florence and her companion.

The two first were full length pictures, portraits apparently of a cavalier and his lady in the graceful costume of the reign of Charles the First.

The lady was young and very beautiful; with long ringlets of pale gold, restrained partially by a fillet of pearls, and then flowing down her white neck and over her rich robe of purple brocade.

The cavalier, evidently much older, was a stern, morose looking man, whose dark, but not unhandsome features, wore a forbidding expression.

In his hand the cavalier held a Spanish hat with white plumes, and his dress was superb with the embroidery and jewelled buttons, and point lace of a gentleman of the court.

These two pictures hung on either side of the fireplace in the yellow drawing-room.

Lady Bess laughed heartily as she surveyed them.

"If this lady and gentleman were man and wife," she said, "I think they must both have had a pleasant time of it. For she, so pretty and young, it's not likely but she would lighten her dull life at masques and balls, where smart things would be said to her by some fair gallant, and the husband here, so dark and surly, looks as if he would punish her at the dagger's point for the amusement. Is he not an evil-looking old brute, Miss Amery?"

Florence had stood gazing in a kind of stupefied silence at the pictuee, and almost involuntarily she now replied—

"This must be a fancy portrait, do you not see that it is the likeness of Sir Miles Cresseingham?"

"Is it?" exclaimed Bess in an almost startled accent. "I have never seen Sir Miles, but if that is his picture he is capable of worse than carrying off a beautiful young lady to force her to marry him. I do not think him very bad for that, Miss Amery. It is the wretch who deludes a poor foolish creature with fine promises which he has no intent to keep, and then leaves her to want and infamy—perhaps to a shameful death! Oh, I would kill such villains—I would hang them all on one rope!"

Lady Bess spoke fiercely and earnestly, with flushed cheek and sparkling eyes. She looked as though she would exact a terrible revenge on the man who dared to injure her.

"Alas!" answered Florence, "the man who would force a woman to wed him against her will would reek but little of committing a worse iniquity."

Desirous of a closer examination of the picture. Florence then took the lamp from Lady Bess, and mounting a chair and holding the light close to the picture, found to her surprise the name of "Vandyke pricxit," in the corner.

The excellence of the portrait was such, that the astonishment of Florence did not originate in the discovery that it was the work of so great a master, but in the extraordinary resemblance of Sir Miles to the picture of one who must have been a remote ancestor.

On pursuing their examination of these pictures, Florence and Lady Bess found in the bed chamber another painting in which the portrait of the cavalier was introduced.

This picture was of a singular and almost fearful character.

It had apparently been taken at the time of the rebellion, the cavalier had evidently passed over to the Puritan party, his long curling locks were shorn close, the colours of his dress were the Parliamentary orange and purple.

The moroseness of the roundhead increased the natural sternness of his harsh features, but with that repulsive sternness was in this picture strangely mingled an expression of unutterable fear and horror, as if the man had lived in a constant hell of wierd supernatural terror.

By his side in this picture stood the same lady whose portrait hung in the adjoining chamber.

She also had apparently laid aside the costly apparel of a court lady.

Her garment was a long loose white robe that might have been the apparel of the grave; the golden hair unbound, and looking pale and faded strewed over her shoulders, not a particle of colour was in the face, the hand was held up as in a warning or threatening manner, the eyes fixed with a stern and mournful expression on the horror struck countenance of the cavalier, and the white garments dabbled in blood that flowed from a gaping wound that disfigured the bosom.

Florence shudd red and Lady Bess uttered an exclamation of horror at the sight of this picture.

"The villain!" exclaimed Bess, "that lady was his wife I suppose, and he murdered her and she haunted him afterwards. Oh, Miss Amery, however shall we sleep in this dreadful place, and with that horrid picture too, just opposite to the foot of your bed, as if that murdered woman were looking in at the curtains."

With all boldness and wickedness and fierce physical courage, Lady Bess was the errant slave of superstition, and even the well regulated mind of Florence was shaken by a kind of nervous horror as she looked upon the terrific picture, which was so placed that as Bess had obseved; it seemed as though the ghastly bleeding woman was looking through the bed curtains, for the picture was of life size and almost filled a panel in the wainscot.

"It is a very disagreeable picture indeed," said Florence, "could we not manage to turn it with the face to the wall?"

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Lady Bess eyed the huge stretch of canvas, and the heavy frame of carved oak, and then shook her head.

"No Miss," she said, "its out of the question, we could not atwixt us lift a corner of it. But I'll have the horrid thing away to-morrow if I make Spider tear it down and burn it. This Sir Miles Cressingham ought to be ashamed of himself to send you or me or either to a horrid broken down ghostified old house such as this. I was engaged to him with a young lady for a little while in the country; but I never thought it was to be in e ruinated haunted sort of a cavern such as this is."

The storm of Bess's indignation was here interrupted by the unlocking of the door of the sitting-room, and the entrance of Mr. Waynard with a tray, bearing supper for Florence—consisting of a boiled chicken and a bottle of wine.

"Humph!" said Lady Bess, somewhat mollified by the appearance of the viands—"it seems, then, you don't mean to starve us to death, only to frighten us, which these horrid rooms will do for me, if I live in them a week, that's for certain."

"Eh, eh, eh!' chuckled old Waynard—"you'll get used to it in time. Use is second nature, my dear. When I was a boy I didn't half like this place myself; but, bless your sparkling eyes, I got used to it; and so will you, my dear, in less than no time. Why, I live along of the ghosts as pleasant and merry now as a mother hen among her chickens. They rather amuse me, than otherwise, they do. But come down stairs now, my dear: there's a jolly supper ready in the little hall, The young lady, I dare say, does not want you to wait."

Florence, of course, gave the girl permission at once to go down to her supper; but questionable as was her companionship, poor Florence would have preferred it to being left alone in those dreary chambers; and, as she glanced at the well-spread tray, she thought of calling the girl back, to partake of the meal with her.

Lady Bess, however, was full anxious to escape from the "ghost rooms," as she called them, even for an hour; and, while Florence hesitated, the door closed behind Lady Bess and Waynard, and she was left to take her supper alone, and with such appetite as her over-fatigued frame and distracted mind would allow.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BRAVE ELLINOR. — THE ARTIST LOVER. — THE INVALID RETURNS TO HEALTH. — THE DISCOVERY. — LOVE OR HONOUR.

THE overwrough mind of Ellinor Amery had given way, for more than a week after the murder of the poor old servant, and the abduction of her sister Florence. She had laid at the inn to which the Marquis of Bridgnorth had conveyed her in the paroxysms of a nervous fever.

She could give no information either as to the murder or her missing sister; the inquest was over, a warrant issued for the apprehension of Michael the gipsy, who has escaped from the round-house at Epping, and the remains of the poor murdered servant were laid in the grave.

So soon as the crisis of Ellinor's disorder was past, and she became conscious of passing events, the Marquis of Bridgnorth sought and obtained permission from the physicians whom he had called in to attend her, to remove the young lady from the inn, where as stated the unavoidable noise and bustle must necessary retard her recovery.

This was very true, and the consent of the md cal men was freely given accordingly.

It was also true that the restoration of Ellinor's health was the most engrosing thought of the marquis.

There was, however, an "arriere pensee" as the French call it, an ulterior purpose, an unexpired design, which helped to make the marquis most anxious and uneasy while Ellinor lay ill at a public inn.

Nothing was more probable than that in such a place, his real rank might become known, for the marquis had represented himself as a private gentleman.

The marquis was above all else desirous to conceal his true position from Ellinor, because though in consequence of two years absence on the continent he aad never met Ellinor in fashionable society, it was at the same time so notorious that there was a Marchioness of Bridgnorth' that he felt his cause with her was lost should she know his identity.

Of a noble, generous, candid nature; true and good in all save his unhappy passion for Ellinor, the marquis well understood the rectitude, the high sense of honour, which had so large a share in enhancing the love which her beauty and wit had first inspired.

Yes, the marquis loved Ellinor for her pure mind, for her untarnished honour, yet, in his infatuated and guilty love he would have deprived her of the very excellence which he most adored.

"Deceitful, devilish, and desperately wicked," is the Scripture illustration of the heart of man.

Alas! it is desperately inconsistent also. The marquis loved Ellinor so enthusiastically because she was so intellectual so high-minded, so pure in heart and soul, and in the frenzy of that love he would have degraded her to a level with the vilest of her sex.

Oh, poor, deceived, suffering Ellinor! How delicious to her were the accents of Walter Villier's voice as he hung over her sick couch, and poured the balm of hope into her almost broken heart.

How greedily she listened to the never ceasing praise which poor Jane, the housemaid, lavished on this paragon of lovers.

How very cunning and mean is vice; how it herds the noblest with the vilest natures.

In the midst of the horror and confusion attendant on the encounter with Ellinor in the forest on the night of the murder, the marquis had whispered to his valet, who had been dozing in the rumble, that no real name and position were to be named either in the hearing of the lady, or at any place to which he might carry her.

So it was that when Ellinor was carefully conveyed in a luxurious carriage to an elegantly furnished villa at Walthamstow, her faculties were still so dazed as it were with her recent delirium, and the slowly coming remembrance of the murder of the old servant, and the loss of her sister, that as she turned her aching head on the soft pillows, the whisper that Walter, her beloved, had suddenly become the heir of an elegant fortune, was like a whisper from heaven to her.

The most tasteful and elegant simplicity prevailed in the charming villa to which Ellinor was conveyed. By the watchful tenderness of the Marquis of Bridgnorth, the elegant simplicity which is purchased by great wealth which spends a large sum in the affectation of seeming to spend little.

When Ellinor awakened from the deep sleep into which opiates and the removal from the inn at Epping had thrown her, the sun of a bright summer morning was piercing through the curtains of the windows and the green and white draperies of her bed.

Spent and exhausted by the violence of the fever, Ellinor, though free from pain, was now in that condition in which it is an effort even to speak.

She feebly moved back the side curtains of her bed. The faithful Jane was seated beside her—her face alight with smiles.

"Oh! Miss Ellinor—dear Miss Ellinor," said the good girl, "you must make haste and get well. That dear, beautiful, grand-looking Mr. Villiers has brought us to such a beautiful place. There—look, miss. See what a beautiful bedroom,"—and Jane threw wide the curtains of the bed, that her young mistress might look round the elegant chamber,

Ellinor did look with delight, at the thought that her generous Walter had become possessed of a fortune, which enabled him to surround her with so much simple elegance.

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MISTRESS AND MAID.

The appointments of the room were all so light, and cool, and pretty, with the curtains of transparent muslin, lined and trimmed with light green silk; and the toilette cover of fine lace, over green silk. The carpet was a white ground, figured with ivy leaves.

The tables were of satin-wood; so were the chairs—the clouded cream colour of the wood contrasting prettily with the cushions of green silk.

There were no gaudy colours—no glitter of gold—in the appointment even of the toilette table. Delicate porcelain, cut glass, and silver—chaste and pure—were employed for the dressing-table and wash-stand.

"Oh! Miss Ellinor," said poor Jane, "you must make haste and get well—indeed you must. There's such a lovely drawing-room down stairs; and such a sweet little parlour; and a pretty conservatory, all full of such beautiful plants: and, oh! Miss Ellinor, you will be so happy—you will, indeed."

And Ellinor progressed towards returning health; and would, indeed, have been very happy, but that she could gain no news of her beloved sister Florence; and her surprise that Herbert Mandeville did not seek an interview with her. She knew not that he had been denied admittance to her.

Poor, poor Ellinor, destined to wake so soon from a dream af Paradise, and find herself on the brink of the regions of eternal hell!

In that sweet delusion that a life of happiness was in store for her, without a care save for the fate of her darling sister, the youth and fine constitution of Ellinor bestowed on her a rapid convalescence.

Still, as her recovered health gave the clear and active mind of Ellinor its accustomed sway, she was sensible of some surprise that Walter Villiers, in their long sweet interviews, never adverted to the prospect of their marriage.

With the fastidious delicacy, however, of a refined woman, Ellinor accused herself for suffering her thoughts to rest upon such a topic, and persuaded herself that her still infirm health, and the recent death of her father, were the causes of her lover's silence.

These doubts—this anxiety—which Ellinor could not always wholly subdue, were the dark clouds that betokened the coming tempest.

It was about a week after Ellinor had been able to leave her bedroom for the charming little parlour below, of which Jane had spoken.

It was a lovely summer evening, and Ellinor had gone

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up to her bedroom in search of a book which she had left there.

A pretty garden, of about an acre in extent, surrounded the villa; and Walter Villiers, as the Marquis of Bridgnorth chose to call himself, had sent a very experienced gardener to direct the less skilful people who were putting it in order.

The gardener was, in fact, the son of the man who managed the magnificent grounds of the marquis's principal estate.

William Batson was a gay rollicking young fellow, devotedly attached to his lord, and a person whom the marquis had, along with his valet, entrusted with more than one secret connected with his intrigues.

This young man was trimming the plants in the conservatory when Ellinor went up to her bedroom; and, a minute afterwards, Lord Bridgnorth's valet, who was sent with a letter for Ellinor, arrived at the villa.

By the maid-servant, who opened the gate, he was told that Miss Amery was in the parlour—to which he proceeded; and, finding that Ellinor was not there, he joined Batson in the conservatory.

The two were great friends and confidants, devotedly attached to their lord, and hating the unfortunate marchioness, who was so cruel a torment to a husband who would have been glad to get rid of her, somewhat more bitterly than she perhaps merited.

Fretful, jealous, and unhappy as she was, the marchioness was, indeed, the opposite of a kind or indulgent mistress, and wreaked upon her servants the ill-temper which she dared not always exhibit to her lord.

The two servants, then, Batson and Rainford, the valet, not heeding that Ellinor had returned to the parlour, very candidly expressed to each other the mutual opinion that it would be a very good thing if her ladyship would choose to die.

"She becomes more overbearing and ill tempered every day," said Rainford.

"And she does not improve in beauty, either," answered Batson. "In course, her being always in such ill temppers—a fretting of herself, and worrying of my lord—makes her face look as sour as her temper. I'm blest if the day I came up to London my lady didn't look, to all the world, as if she had breakfasted off lemons, with white wine vinegar to wash them down. Wanted to find out why my lord wanted me here in town, too! But her ladyship didn't catch a weasel asleep, take your oath, Mr. Rainford."

"I dare say not Batson," answered the valet. "What a pity my lady does not hop off the hooks, and leave my lord free to marry this beautiful Miss Amery."

The valet and gardener were now so eager in their conversation that they never looked toward the parlour, to which Ellinor at that moment returned.

She caught the last words of Rainford, and for a moment stood petrified at their purport; then, as the two went on eagerly talking, she stepped nearer to the half-closed door of the conservatory, and listened with breathless eagerness to their conversation.

Surely if ever there was a case in which eaves-dropping was not only pardonable but justifiable, that of Ellinor Amery in the present instance was one.

"Ah," replied Batson, in answer to the valet's last remark. "How do you think this affair of Miss Amery will turn out—she's a sweet young lady."

"That she is," answered Rainford, "just fit to be my lord's wife if he had not got one already; just fit to be a duchess, indeed, that's what she is."

"That she is, Mr. Rainford, that she is," returned Batson. "What a pity! How does my lord ever think to get over with her if she finds out he's married, why she'll be just fit to break her heart—she will."

"And so will my lord be ready to break his heart too," said Rainford. "He does love this young lady, Batson, and no mistake, and he is not satisfied with himself about the business either; why he walks his room all night, sometimes, and talks to himself about being a villian planning to ruin an angel, and sighs as if his heart would burst."

"Bother my lady," exclaimed Batson; "she pretends to be so mighty fond of my lord. I think, for my part, he best thing she can do is to die, and get out of the way."

"No hopes of that, Batson," returned the valet; "if you observe them sort of people whose deaths would be a real blessing, never do die."

"Mr. Rainford, what do you think as I have sometimes amost made up my mind to do about this here business," said Batson, furiously slashing at some Cape heaths in his forgetfulness of all but his master's love affairs.

"Well, I don't know, Batson," apswered the valet. "My opinion is, that the best we can do is to hear, see, and say nothing. His lordship is a kind, good master, and I pity him from my heart."

"So do I, Mr. Rainford, so do I," returned Batson, I and it's just because I know he is so kind and good that "think sometimes it would be a good service both to him and the poor young lady to tell her the whole truth. For, mark my words, Mr. Rainford, that young lady, Miss Amery, will never live as my lord's mistress, and, in course, he cannot make her his wife."

"More's the pity," sighed the valet.

"I don't believe, for my part, that Miss Ellinor would agree to be the mistress of a king," said Batson, stoutly.

"Why, for the matter of that," answered the valet, "a mistress is a mistress, Batson, and I don't see that the mistress of a king, is a bit better than a girl that dangles at the church and sings and kisses with you or I."

The conversation of the two men was here interrupted by the sound of carriage wheels, and a loud ring at the outer gate of the villa.

"Good gracious," exclaimed the valet, "if that isn't my lord come here himself after sending me down with a letter to Miss Amery, to say that he should not be able to see her till to-morrow."

"Jemini!" ejaculated the gardener, "and here have we been talking away, and perhaps she is in the parlour."

"The Lord forbid!" exclaimed the valet, looking into the room through the glass door of the conservatory.

"All right," he said. "She's not there, and here comes my lord."

The marquis stept briskly from his carriage, and walking into the parlour, sent the housemaid up to look for Ellinor in her bed room.

The next moment a wild cry from the girl echoed through the house, she found Ellinor stretched upon the floor as cold and senseless as if she were already dead.

Ellinor had remained in the parlor a horror-struck listener to the colloquy of the two servants, till the arrival of the marquis, then she tottered from the room, groped her way up stairs to her chamber, and fell prostrate when she reached it in that deadly swoon.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MAUD AMERY AND THE MASKER'S.—THE HOUSE IN THE EDGWARE-ROAD.—MAUD AND THE DUKE OF ALCASTER.

THE mask who accompanied the prince, and who had accosted Maud Amery at the same time as the Regent addressed her sister Alice, hurried the young woman to the end of the dark walk without speaking.

There two masks in blue dominoes were waiting to whom her companion hastily consigned the astonished and now terrified Maud, saying—

"I cannot accompany you sweetest, for the prince requires my attendance, but I have arranged everything, and the carriage is waiting."

As the mask spoke, he pressed the hand of Maud passionately to his lips, and disappeared before, in her confusion and surprise, she could explain the mistake he had committed, for though the mask had spoken almost in a whisper, Maud had recognised in his voice the tones of the Duke of Alcaster.

It was evident to Maud, that the duke had mistaken

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her for her sister Clara, to whom he had so closely devoted himself on the preceding evening.

To say that Maud was shocked, could by no means convey an idea of her surprise and disgust, at finding that her sister Clara had consented to elope with the Duke, for Clara well knew that he was a married man, though his Duchess was so exclusive in the society with which she mingled, that the daughters of the "parvenu" Mr. Amery had been admitted among the "haute noblesse" whom her Grace visited.

The two maskers to whom the Duke had consigned Maud, took hold of her by either arm, and one of them threw a mantle over her head, saying at the same time in a tone of apology—

"You will pardon us this seeming rudeness madam, as we are under the orders of his Grace."

The man then lifted her in his arms as though she had been a child, and carried her to that same private entrance of the gardens, by which, after the catastrophe to Lady Fitzwalter, the prince at a later hour in the evening conveyed away the swooning Alice.

The mantle was heavy, and Maud half stifled by the folds, could not sufficiently extricate herself to speak till she was lifted into a carriage which drove rapidly away.

She then threw off the mantle and addressing her captors, who had leaped into the carriage after her, assured them that a mistake had been made, and that she was not the lady whom their employer thought he had consigned to them.

The two masks in a very polite and equally determined manner, assured Maud that they were not responsible for any mistake of their employer; if he had given the wrong lady into their charge, he must answer for his own blunder afterwards, it was their part simply to obey his orders.

Their lord they were well assured was quite too gallant a gentleman to detain any lady against her will, and doubtless would himself release her if there were indeed any mistake, though they could scarcely think that after a survey of the abode to which they were taking her, the lady herself would persist in the assertion that there was any mistake.

Finding expostulation useless, Maud sat silently shedding tears while the carriage was being driven at a rapid pace over Westminster Bridge, and from thence up Oxford Street, in the direction of the Edgware Road, then a rural and thinly populated district.

Maud was overcome with grief and mortification.

Maud had a kind heart, and she was, as yet, chaste and pure in thought and deed.

Not Ellinor or Florence themselves could have felt a more crushing shame, at learning, as she had done, the patent infamy of Clara.

But Maud unfortunately had a weak mind; her virtue was the result of habit rather than principle. She had been accustomed to the pleasures and luxuries attendant on wealth; her virtue had not been assailed by the temptations of poverty.

Maud had not, indeed, as yet experienced any actual diminution of comfort from the misfortunes and death of her father, and poverty was merely a word which conveyed no precise meaning to her ear.

She felt then that there was something very disgraceful in the conduct of Clara, and she was frightened at having been mistaken for her sister, and sat imagining all possible and impossible dangers, and weeping quietly.

Poor Maud was one of those women, who, instead of opposing misfortune, sit down to shed over it unavailing tears.

Women of this class will always pass through life with a sort of passive credit, if they encounter no sharp sorrows or violent temptations.

But they must have support; like the ivy to the oak, they must have something to cling to, and if that support fails them, like the ivy they grovel on the ground.

Maud took but little heed of the time that the journey continued until it was terminated by the carriage stopping in what appeared a very rural district, but which was the extremity of the Edgware Road, very near to Kilburn.

A high wall enclosed the house in its own grounds, and the carriage stopped before a handsome pair of iron gates.

Maud suffered herself to be handed in silence from the carriage, and led into the house.

Not even the glitter of Lady Fitzherbert's villa, or the heavier richness of decoration in the town and country mansions of her father, had prepared Maud for the scene of fairy-like splendour that burst upon her in the apartment into which she was ushered.

The chamber was on the ground floor, with glass-doors opening into a beautiful garden.

Beyond the smooth gravelled walk on which the doors opened, was a velvet-like lawn, sprinkled as it were with grafted rose trees in every variety, just now in full bloom, red, white, and yellow, or draped with lovely moss.

In the centre of the lawn, a fountain of white marble, the design was exquisitely wrought, and pouring from a shell the water, which sparkled like frosted silver as it rose and fell in the moonlight.

At the foot of the lawn was a magnificent clump of flowers, among which were many of the good old English growth.

The queen lily, swinging her snowy bells in the soft breeze; the towering and gorgeous hollyoak, the rich olave carnation, and others less homely in their origin; the flaring cactus and geranium, the rhododendron, with its large bunches of purple blossom, and the hydranger with its tufts of flowers of a delicate palsy pink.

The garden, though not much beyond an acre in extent, was exquisitely kept, and the unsightliness of the high brick wall that surrounded it was concealed by the graceful forms of the tall poplars that overtopped it by many feet, and by a thick plantation of pink and white acacia, syringæ, and other flowering shrubs below.

These demarcations of the garden were not at first noted by Maud, who perceived only, on all sides, the wall which shut her out from the hope of quitting the house, save with the knowledge or permission of its inmates.

The glass that filled the upper half of the doors was richly stained, and threw a glow of purple and crimson on the carpet—a white ground, with flower-work of amber.

The walls were hung, and the windows curtained, with pale rose-colour silk, embroidered with myrtle twigs, in silver.

Stuffed birds, of gorgeous plumage; elegant vases, filled with rare exotics; exquisite cabinet fixtures; costly mirrors; miniature groups, in silver and Parian marble, from the antique; every costly frivolity that wealth could purchase was, as it were, heaped up in that apartment.

A table in the centre was spread with a delicate cold collation: cold game and chickens; delicious pastry; silver baskets, filled with ripe fruits; dressed cream, in a china bowl; sparkling wines, and rich liquors.

The luxury that surrounded her rather frightened than gratified Maud Amery. She had just intelligence enough to be aware that she who enjoyed must pay a price for it; and virtue enough to shrink from such a traffic.

So poor foolish Maud, who had neither the heroism of virtue, nor the bad courage of vice, left the luxurious banquet untasted, and sat down again to weep.

Her tears were interrupted before long by a ringing at the garden gate. She heard the hurrying of the servants' feet, a slight confusion in the hall, and then the master of the house entered the apartment.

Maud started up, her anticipations were correct, she stood face to face with the Duke of Alcaster.

The duke started, his fair guest was not the person whom he had anticipated.

Poor Maud clasped her hands.

"Oh! your Grace," she exclaimed, "why have I been

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brought to this place. Oh! let me go, let me return to Lady Fitzwalter."

"Miss Maud Amery if I mistake not?" said the duke, bending a glance of admiration on the beautiful girl, whose terror had for the time dispelled the in ipidity in the blonde fa e which made her u sually so much resemble her sister Clara

"Y s—ves, I am Maud Amery," exclaimed the young gi l, "your Grace must be aware that I have been brought hither by some mis ake, oh pray pray let me go."

The countenance of the Duke was flushed, he had been drinking somewhat deeply with his royal associate the prince, and though the duke was so far free from the vice of which the gentlemen of the time were so little ashamed, that he never drank wine to intoxication, yet his deep potations had rendered him a little bolder and more unscrupulous than was his wont.

"It was the languishing insipidity of Clara that had charmed him, but Maud, who so much resemble her, now appeared to him like Clara in another mood.

"Do not weep my charmer," he said, seizing Maud's hand, and leading her to a seat near the banquet, "do not weep, there has been a mistake most certainly, or I should not have been made happy by your presence here to-night."

Maud's spirits revived, she did not contemplate that the Duke would detain her against her will, and she answered eagerly.

"Oh yes, yes, I was sure that your Grace would admit that it was a mistake, and you will let me go, you will kindly permit me the use of a carriage to return to Lady Fitz valter."

"Yes, yes, no doubt as to the mistake my angel," said the duke, gazing upon Maud with a freedom with which she had both good sense and virtue to feel indignant.

"Yes it was a mistake, but on my honour, it is a confoundedly pleasant one which I am glad has occured."

The duke in this speech, like the knight, mentioned by the facetious Touchstone, swore by that which was not, namely, his hon ur.

But though he took his honour in vain, he was not foresworn since his honour was nought, and he really was well pleased that Maud in her present mood was his visitor rather then Clara, for there was something of piquancy for him in Maud's distress,

"Let me entreat your Grace," said Maud, forcibly withdrawing her hand from the duke, and rising from the table, "let me entreat to be sent home at once."

The duke was a little nettled at the extreme earnestness of her manner, and yet it excited in him an admira ion for her which he had never felt before.

He drew her back to her chair with a determined hand.

"Why will you not understand me, beautiful Maud," he said. "There has been a mistake; your sister Clara is less promise than you are my lovely puritan, and vouchsafed a geniac that she would honour this my poor abode with her presence; but fate has willed otherwise, her still more charming sister, has been by a happy chance brought hither in her stead, and I, lovely Maud, take the good the g ds provide me, and am grateful."

As the duke spoke he clasped Maud in his arms, and imprinted a kiss upon her rosebud lips.

The poor girl, seriously alarmed, wrenched herself from his embrace, she was roused by the insulting freedom to the exhibition of a spirit not unworthy of her sister Ellinor.

"Does your Grace dare express the name of honour," she exclaimed—

"Do you pretend to the character of a gentleman—much more one of England's peers? Let me go, my lord duke: I desire, I command it! If my sister Clara promised to visit your grace to-night, shame be on her for the infamy. She knows that your duchess still lives; that you cannot wed her, even if you would."

The duke laughed aloud at these words: a coarse insulting laugh, that one would not have expected to hear from the lips of so refined a gentleman.

"The duchess still lives!" he exclaimed, reiterating, with an insulting emphasis, the words of Maud. "Indeed, I hope she does; for I honour and esteem her grace, as a noble and virtuous lady, and my wife. I cannot w d your sister, if I would, you s y. My charming Miss Maud Ame y, allow me to disabuse your ingenuous mind of an error. Understand, Miss Maud Amery, if the Duchess of Alce ter were gather d to the tomb of her ancesters, the event would in no whit alter my conduct or designs with reference to yourself, or that very tame and insipid beauty, your sister Clara. My dear Miss Maud Amery, you are very young, and, it appears, very simple; but I should have thought even the compass of your wit and knowledge of the world would have sufficed to show you that under no possible circumstances could the Du e of Alcester wed a daughter of Amery, the suicide-gambler of the race course."

The Duke of Alcester, like his royal friend the Prince Regent, peculiarly piqued himself upon being a first class gentleman.

He would have deeply aveng d himself on the man who dared to question his honour; but what a strange honour that was which did not prevent him so cruelly insulting a poor defenceless woman!

If his honour would, under any circumstances, have forbidden him to ma ry one of the daughters of a plebeian, it should also have restrained him from seeking to deprive them of their honour, the only possession left them.

Even poor imbecile Maud felt this, and she replied with dignity—

"May I, on my part, beg that your grace will understand that if you think my father's daughter is not g od enough to be your wife, I think she is too good to be your mistress; and, moreover, as far as I am myself concerned, I must assure your grace that I would never marry for rank or w alth, and the fortune and coronet of your grace would not induce me to marry a man so many years my senior."

Poor foolish Maud, she spoke with a frankness that converted his grace into a determined foe, for she wounded his vanity on a point wherein he was as sensitive as the most frivolous woman.

She actually told him to his face that he was too old for a lover.

She could not have committed a more inexpiable offence.

The duke felt it incumbent on him to avenge himse'f by robbing her of what he found she valued—her position as an honourable woman.

He at first turned pale with rage; then again, clasping her rudely, he said—

"You have some boy lover, I suppose, on behalf of whom you insult me; but you shall never rejoin him till I have taught you that the position of my mistress is one of which you might be proud. I vow, my charmer, that I like you the better for your insolence."

Maud shrieked aloud as the duke caught her again in his arms, and extricating herself from him, she rushed out into the garden.

His grace undertook to pursue her, but he was rather corpulent, and really, as Maud had so rudely informed him, was getting to be an eld rly gentleman, so he puffed and wheez d considerably, as he chased the nimble-footed young girl along the gravel walks.

If Maud had not been so thoroughly frightened, she would have been greatly amused, as she turned her head over her shoulder, to see this ancient Lotario running after her, with his wig awry, his arms extended, and his face purple with anger at the unwonted exercise of such a race.

"Stop! stop!" cried his grace. "Here John, Thomas, William," he called to his servants.

But they none of them heard him, as of course the gardeners were not about at that hour, though it was a moonlight summer night, and the other servants kept aloof from the apartment in which they supposed he was supping with the lady.

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Twice the perverse Maud compelled this distinguished nobleman to chase her round the garden, and then she took her way across the lawn; his grace, of course, followed her, and here his feats as a runner was most unhappily terminated.

The lawn was saturated with the dew, the duke's foot slipped, and he not measured his length upon the grass in a most undignified manner, but his head coming in contact with the marble bason of the fountain, he laid stunned and senseless to the great terror of Maud, who finding he did not move, ventured to approach him, and then seeing the blood flowing down his face from a wound on his forehead, ran back to the house screaming for assistance.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FLORENCE AND LADY BESS.—THE DOUBLE DREAM AT THE BLACKWATER.—LADY BESS AND THE SPIDER.

THE Spider, Lady Bess, and the servants of Sir Miles Cressingham at the old house on the Blackwater, prolonged their supper till it became cruel.

Poor Florence meanwhile, sat trembling in her distant chamber. The wind moaned mournfully within and passed with a dreary sighing sound through the wide galleries and deserted chambers of the old mansion, and even when the wind lulled, the roar of the cascade almost below her window was a monotonous and dismal sound.

A storm was rising, and as it came screaming from across the wide ocean, it assailed in its fullest fury that old mansion.

Then the rain dashed against the windows, the blue lightening shed its ghastly glare on the white foaming waters of the current, and paled the feeble lustre of Florence's lamp as it quivered through the spacious chamber, bringing out in sharp relief the figures of the cavalier and lady on either side of the fireplace, and touching with the same spectral aspect as they were in the terrific picture in the beechamber.

Florence was not superstitious, but circumstances will sometimes overpower the strongest mind, and as she sat trembling with grief and cold, for the fire was sinking low, and Lady Bess did not reappear, it seemed to her that wild voices threatening strange calamity, mingled with the howling wind, that weird forms, shapeless and undefined, but terrible in their indistinctness hovered round her, ever banishing in the obscurity when she found courage to turn and gaze on them.

Had Lady Bess returned, Florence would have gladly sought her couch.

But an unutterable fear and horror had taken possession of her; she dared not move, she scarcely dared to glance around her. She sat, pale, cold, and trembling, vainly longing for the appearance even of the depraved young woman who had helped to tear her from her home.

So the hours passed away; the ashes of the wood fire which Maynard had kindled were falling cold and white upon the hearth, the lamp was sinking also, and amid the wild hurtling of the tempest, Florence heard the great clock of the old mansion toll the hour of one.

Simultaneously with the stroke of the clock, she heard, or fancied she heard, a rustling sound, as if one in silken garments had glided past her and entered the open door of the bed room.

The overwrought nerves of Florence yielded to this horrible fancy, and she shrieked aloud.

At that moment she heard the bolts of the outer door withdrawn, and the young woman, Bess, entered, followed by old Maynard, bending under a pile of wood to replenish the fires.

The handsome features of Lady Bess were flushed, and her brow gathered in a frown.

"What did you scream for, lady?" she said, addressing Florence. "The ghosts which are said to haunt this chamber. will scarce do either of us as much harm as the living creatures without."

Florence attempted an excuse for her weakness.

"I know not what foolish impulse it was under which I cried out," she said, "but never was a human face more welcome to me than yours is now. There is something in the atmosphere and aspect of this apartment that affects me with a horror which I cannot describe."

"It is a dismal place enough," answered Lady Bess, "but we have to choose between ghosts in this room and worse than murderers without. I shall take care to secure both you and myself from the last; and you, lady, who are so good and virtuous, will doubtless be able with your prayers to save us from the last."

Lady Bess uttered the last words with a sneer that was anything but agreeable to Florence, then bidding old Maynard to be quick in mending the fire, she walked towards the outer door of the chamber, and after examining its inner fastenings, called out from it—

"There, you Spider, I know as you slunk up stairs after me and Mr. Maynard. Now, take care what you are about, my man. Don't you go to try any more of your gammon and impudence of making love to me. I won't have it. Now I see that the inside fastenings of this door are good. But take care how you try any of your housebreaker's tools on it. I just give you fair warning. I warn't going to travel with such a fellow as you, and not be ready to pay you out if you played any of your tricks. So I keep a pair of pistols about me—and they are loaded, too—and so sure as you dare break into this room, or lay a finger on me, or this here young lady, I'll blow your brains out—that's what I will."

"Eh, eh, eh!" chuckled old Maynard, who had just finished repairing the fire. "You are a brave lass, Lady Bess—a very brave lass. You would have been just a wife for one of the lords of Cressingham—that's what you would."

"Don't talk any of your stuff neither, old man," answered Bess, ungratefully repulsing the compliment. I ain't a going to be bullied or coaxed by the one or t'other of you. Now, don't poke your ugly face in here, Spider; we don't want to see it. I'm sure the ghostes couldn't be worse. Take yourself off, while your shoes are good."

Florence, who had approached the now blazing fire, to warm her chilled frame, looked towards the door at these last words of Bess, and perceived the ill-favoured and sinister countenance of the Spider peering in at it.

"Lady Bess, my darling," he said, "don't be so hard on a poor fellow—don't. Don't go for to be too vicious 'cause a poor fellow falls in love with you; 'cos he can't help that—it is along of your being so handsome, my dear."

"If you dare stay there another minute," said Lady Bess, fiercely, and taking a pistol from her bosom, with a determined look, "I will try how a brace of bullets will agree with your love."

This threat, and the glitter of the pistol in the glare of the fire, effectually dismayed the Spider, who shuffled off immediately, with abject apologies for having in any way offended the virago upon whom he had fixed his affections.

Bess ordered the old servant of the house, Maynard, to follow him; and the ancient servitor was not slow to obey the command: nor did he indulge in his customary chuckle—the truth being that he was somewhat startled by the very energetic manner of Lady Bess.

Florence, also, lifted her fawn-like eyes to the flushed face of Bess, with somewhat of terror, as well as wonder, in their expression.

Bess noticed this, and. with a bitter laugh, she said:

"Why do you look so terrified, young lady? Do you think I would harm you? You wrong me, if you do think so. I am getting weak and foolish. The horror I feel for that monster, the Spider, almost makes me pity you about this Sir Miles Cressingham. It is very dreadful to be pursued by the love of a man you hate. But come, we will not talk more of these things to-night. You must be wearied, and we both must try to rest."

There was no gainsaying this, and Florence, not knowing whether most to fear or hope with regard to her strange companion, prepared to seek her couch.

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Lady Bess shut the door of communication between the two apartments, heaped additional logs on the blazing fire in the bed chamber, and set open the door of the closet in which she was herself to sleep, so that she and Florence would catch sight of each other.

The storm still raged wildly without, and the green wood flared and spluttered, not only with its own juices but the rain that pattered on it down the wide aperture of the chimney.

The deep breathing of Bess gave token of her enjoying a profound sleep, long ere Florence could close her eyes.

What was the fate of her beloved sister? Where was Herbert Mandeville, her betrothed, who was, ere this, to have been her husband? and what danger, worse than death, had she not to fear from the villian Sir Miles?

The fierce howling of the gust that swept through the long passages and empty chambers, shaking the doors and casements, against the latter of which the rain beat with a fury that made itself heard even above the voices of the blast.

The tumult of the storm, which seemed as it were to rock the house to its foundations, might have driven slumber even from the couch of one whose mind was at ease, and in the case of poor Florence it helped to excite the wildest and most superstitious fancies.

The curtains at the foot of the bed had been left a little apart, and betwixt them, as before observed, could be seen the ghostly picture of the dark cavalier who was so like Sir Miles, and the pale bleeding lady.

This picture had impressed both Bess and Florence so painfully, that as the removal of it was a task beyond their strength, they had with some trouble concealed it by hanging over the frame the cover from a large table in the adjoining room.

This article had once been very magnificent, for it was of purple and silk velvet, faded with damp and dust, and it looked like a pall in the waning light of the wood fire.

With each successive blast of wind too, the heavy folds waved backwards and forwards, and suggested to Florence the idea that there must be some crevice in the wainscot through which it was admitted.

By a strange fascination, Florence felt compelled as it were to keep her eyes upon this frightful picture.

She wished that Lady Bess had not put the covering before it, and her vivid fancy presented that which the drapery concealed to her mind's eye with life-like truth.

She could neither remove her gaze from the veiled picture, nor rise and close the curtains of her bed so as to exclude it entirely.

It seemed to Florence that if she did this, her spectral fancies would become still more active.

Then at last she fell asleep, with her closing eyes taking a last look at the veiled canvass, which seemed possessed of a mysterious power.

The wind continued to rave and sob round the old house, and its wailing voice suggested sounds of human suffering to the sleeping Florence.

She was visited by a strange dream.

She thought that she was lying, as she actually did, in the dreary chamber in the old house on the Blackwater.

Instead however of the decaying embers which had shot up their last feeble gleam as she closed her eyes, a huge fire blazed upon the hearth.

The old and faded furniture too had disappeared, and all the appointments of the room were new and costly though in the fashion of a time gone by.

Instead too of the bare and bleak-looking oak wainscot, magnificent tapestry hung upon the walls.

The mysterious picture, of course, had disappeared.

Suddenly Florence became aware of the presence of a beautiful lady, who reclined on a low couch of crimson velvet, near the fire, which blazed brightly and lit up the sparkling jewels on the lady's neck and brow, and the shimmering lustre of her voluminous robe of white satin.

It was the lady of the two pictures, young, glowing, and beautiful, but with the fires of an unholy love, deepening the rose tint of her cheek, and sparkling in her bright blue eyes.

At the lady's feet knelt a cavalier, not the severe hero of the pictures, but a gay, handsome, beautiful youth: one whom such a husband as the picture pourtrayed might have right earnest cause to dread.

This youth was no Roundhead, his chestnut hair flowed in long perfumed curls over his doublet of merry coloured velvet trimmed with gold lace and buttoned with diamonds, and over his falling collar of Brussels lace.

He knelt at the lady's feet, and pressed her hands to his lips and his heart.

Then he rose, and, growing bolder, he clasped the yielding fair one in his arms, and drank the poisoned nectar of her ruby mouth.

The lady would be wholly his: she would abandon the stern and cruel husband, who was like the vulture to a turtle-dove, who had himself basely forsaken his religion and his king.

Then it seemed to Florence that as the lovers, ere they parted, indulged in one long passionate embrace, that a fold of the tapestry waved, and moved aside, and a countenance, dark as that of a tortured fiend, looked forth upon the lovers.

It was the face of the Roundhead—convulsed and demoniacal with jealous rage.

But the lovers perceived him not; and, after yet another and another fervent lingering kiss, the lady crossed the chamber, and removed the tapestry from a panel in the wall—that very panel in which was hung the ghastly picture by which Florence had been so terrified.

A door appeared—a secret entrance to the lady's chamber: yet another kiss, and the gallant was gone.

Florence moaned and half unclosed her eyes; but sleep sat heavily upon them, and the manner of her visions changed.

She thought that she still lay in the old bedchamber, and the appointments were the same as in her former dream; but no fire blazed cheerfully on the hearth—it was deadly, piercingly cold.

A damp and thrilling cold, like the icy chillness of the grave.

One lamp alone shed a pale and feeble ray in the spacious chamber—defining, rather than dispersing, its gloom.

An unutterable horror fastened on the sleeping Florence. She lay inert, and as if oppressed with a nightmare, but with every faculty of the mind morbidly active.

A weird scene of horror was then exhibited to her entranced soul.

She thought she heard a noise: first a slight rustling; then a heavy sound, as if of the muffled tread of strong feet, followed by a dull concussion, as though two people were dragging some bulky and weighty substance up a staircase.

Still, as the sounds came nearer, it seemed to Florence as if her thrilling numbing sense of cold increased.

Presently the tapestry which the lady had lifted when parting with her lover was again removed, the door beneath it was cautiously opened, and three men appeared.

Laboriously as it seemed, two of these men bore between them the body of a youth, wrapped from head to foot in a riding cloak.

As frozen with horror, Florence glanced at the men and their burden; she was conscious that it was a corpse which they bore.

She became aware that a foul murder had been done.

The companion of these men held a lamp in his hand, and seemed to direct the others.

It was the cavalier of the two pictures, the weird likeness of Sir Miles Cressingham. The corpse was laid upon the floor, and the face uncovered, and then the young girl recognized the features of the gay young cavalier who had held that guilty tryst with the beautiful lady.

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Ghastly and pallid he looked now, disfigured with gaping wounds, and with clotted blood. A devilish artifice of malice was then practiced by the avenging husband.

"Let the lady find her lover first at the wine, big t," he exclaimed. "Place the bridegroom on the downy couch. Let her find him awaiting her when she comes from the banquet."

Then it seemed to Florence, that with grim and smothered laughter, the two men stripped the mantle from the corpse and placed with its glazed and staring eyes, its torn and blood-bedabbled garments on the bed beside the horror stricken Florence.

A strange pang seemed then to seize her, in which she, to her own surprise, echoed the fiendish laugh of the murderers.

But the deadly cold which had before paralized her frame, appeared to assume the severity of the Arctic regions from the vicinity of the murdered man.

A blue phosphoric light filled the apartment, lighting up the features of the murderers, and enduring them with a ghastly expression.

A weight as of irom pressed on the bosom of Florence, and with a wild convulsive shriek she essayed to throw it off.

The effort awoke her.

She was alone in the chamber of the old house on the Blackwater: but an icy coldness bound her frame, and the spectral lustre of her dream filled the apartment, slowly fading out in the darkness, as the agonized girl offered up her prayers for heaven's protection to that abode of the fiends.

CHAPTER XL.

THE DUKE OF ALCASTER AND MAUD AMERY.—THREAT OF THE ANCIENT LOTHARIO.—THE PRETTY HOUSEMAID AND HER LOVER.—THE MALE ATTIRE.—ESCAPE OF MAUD AND ENCOUNTER WITH GERALD WARBURTON.

THE Duke of Alcrster was very little hurt by his fall, and while Maud stood gazing at him in some alarm, the flowing of the blood from the wound in his forehead, restored his faculties and his grace scrambled to his feet looking a very ridiculous figure indeed.

His wig was awry the powder knocked out of it, his white satin vest and point lace ruffles were stained with blood, and worse than all, one of his ducal eyes was black and blue, and sealed up like a prize fighter at the fifth round.

His grace forgot all his gentlemanly courtesy, we are not sure that he did not shake his fist at Maud, his voice was inarticulate with rage.

He threatened her with worse horror than those which had been foretold by Sir Miles.

He would disgrace and ruin her, he would turn her over to the lowest servants, then he would turn her into the streets, she should be dragged through such mire of shame and iniquity, as no woman had ever known before.

Maud was stunned, overpowered as it were by the torrent of his fury, and stood silent till the duke seizing her arm, was so lost to all gentlemanly courtesy as to drag her by the power of his masculine strength, and with no more ceremony than an enraged ploughman might exercised towards a milkmaid.

On returning to the room which they had quitted, the duke thrust Maud into a chair, and then pulled the bell-rope of silver cord with so much violence that it came off in his hand.

The bell, however, had rang a clamorous peal, and the next minute half-a-dozen servants, male and female, had crowded into the room.

"Take this lady—this woman!" roared his grace, correcting the wording of his first expression, "take her, and shut her up in one of the attics; and if you permit her to escape I discharge you all. Here you Jones and Eliza, take her up stairs at once, and Thomas, go for a surgeon! The vixen defied me; she has caused me a black eye—actually a black eye, and the Queen holds a drawing-room next Weduesday. Good gracious! how am I to appear with a black eye—actually a black eye, like some horrid rascal of the canaille. There, take that lady out of my sight at once, or I will not answer but I shall do her a mischeif."

The two servants, Jones and Eliza, the one a kind of assistant to the duke's valet, and the other a very pretty housemaid, offered to remove Maud, but she paused a moment to address the duke as they led her from the room.

"I am sorry for the accident your grace has met with, and your consequent disfigurement," she said, "but I must remind you that your own most dishonourable conduct was the source of it; and I also beg to tell you that I will not submit to be imprisoned by you. There is law in this country for everybody."

"True my charmer," returned the duke, viciously "There is law in the land for all who can pay for it. I'll give you leave to take the law of me when you can. I can buy impunity, I can buy it, and I will pay any price to be revenged on you."

In these threats to Maud, and in the whole of his conduct towards her, the Duke of Alcester suffered his wounded vanity to defeat his common sense.

Maud was quite right; the law would not suffer the Duke of Alcaster to deprive her of liberty without calling him to account, and he was at the mercy of any of his own servants, who from motives either of pique or self-interest might choose to betray him.

The Duke of Alcester was a mere common careless libertine.

He had never had either the necessity or inclination to entrammel himself with such a web of iniquity as that which involved Sir Miles Cressingham.

It was much easier for Sir Miles to have Florence carried down to his dismal house on the Blackwater, and to be made there the victim of protracted villiany, than for the Duke of Alcesfer to detain her sister Maud against her will in his beautiful villa near London for a day.

Sir Miles, who had been in early life a poor man, and who was always a false and wicked one, had all the machinery of crime under his command.

The duke, who had always been possessed of superabundant wealth, had no occasion to maintain at his command a band of paid villians.

His servants had good wages, and were never required to render service within the danger of the law.

With regard to the women, to their great discredit, the duke had had but little difficulty in his amours. His wealth, his fine person, and high position had smoothed for him the path of intrigue.

Though an honest mind can scarce conceive such depravity, it is unquestionable that there are women so devoid both of common sense and common decency, as to prefer being the mistress of a nobleman, to being the wife of a man who lives by industry, whether of the head or the hand.

Such depraved and stupid creatures are, however, it is to be hoped, exceptions among the sex.

Pretty Eliza, the housemaid, was not one of that class.

She had coldly received the compliments which it had pleased the duke on more than one occasion to pay her; and his grace, who had too much honour aud pride to enter on an intrigue with one of his own servants, soon ceased to take notice of her.

Eliza, the pretty housemaid, had a lover—a merry rollicking young fellow—a grocer by trade, who had just come into a legacy of a thousand pounds, which would enable him to go into business for himself, and who was actually closetted in the duke's house that very evening, having called to acquaint Eliza with his good news, and to insist that she should name an almost immediate date for the wedding-day.

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Much Eliza cared for the duke's threat of turning away any servant who ventured to assist in the escape of Maud!

Why, she would not be even minus any portion of her wages; for they had fallen due only the day before, and had been paid that morning.

She pitied Maud most heartily, and could with difficulty refrain from laughing at the ridiculous figure the duke made, with his clothes stained with blood, his wig away and his face purple with passion. It was Eliza's office to do the plain needle work of the house and keep the linen in order, and she had a pretty little sitting room at the top of the house, where she sat plying her needle and singing merrily when not engaged in other duties.

"I will take the young lady to my room Mr. Jones, if you have no objection," said Eliza to the valet.

Bearing the duke's orders in mind the man ought not to have given her any permission of the sort.

But Mr. Jones, the valet, was somewhat smitten with Eliza, and entertained for some month's past, a project of supplanting the grocer, of whose recent good fortune he was ignorant, as Eliza herself had only learned it that evening.

Mr. Jones had raised a good bit of money in the duke's service, and his project was to take a public house, marry the pretty Eliza and make her serve in the bar, when her beauty as he thought would attract plenty of customers.

He therefore readily granted Eliza his permission to take Maud to her apartment, only adding a caution about not permitting her to leave the house. It was now near one in the morning, for in a house devoted as this beautiful villa was to the private pleasure of the Duke of Alcaster very regular hours were not kept, and the servants did pretty much as they pleased.

Eliza had had her young man to supper, and a pretty good supper it was too consisting of cold ham and chicken pie, a roast duck, raspberry and currant tart with custards.

There was no want of liquor to wash down these viands, and her lover, Mr. Hopkins the grocer, was solacing himself with cold brandy-and-water when Eliza entered with Maud Amery in her company.

The unwonted spirit which Maud had exercised so bravely when in the presence of the Duke of Alcaster quite failed now, the immediate excitement and sinking into a chair she gave way to passionate weeping.

Eliza explained to her lover the cause of the young lady's distress, and the orders of the duke that she should not be permitted to leave the house.

Mr. Hopkins pondered the affair for a few minutes, then he said—

"But you know my dear, that there are no law, no justice, nor anything else in the duke a keeping of the young lady here against her will."

"I know that," answered Eliza, "but love you Hopkins what do you think the duke's people care for that. I am sure I would let the young lady out directly, seeing that I don't care if the duke turns me out afterwards; but its another matter with that sneaking Jones, and the rest of the men what are to keep watch night and day, and would not let her pass on no account."

"You'd be main glad to get away Miss I suppose," said the young grocer to Maud.

"Glad!" restorated the poor girl. "Oh I would well reward anyone who would help me to escape from this dreadful house," then she paused, remembering her destitute position, a dependant on the bounty of Lady Fitzwalter, and added with a renewed burst of tears—

"No, no, I cannot reward you. I am very poor—we are all poor since dear papa's death. If I can find no one to help me out of charity, I shall get no help at all."

"Lud, do you think, miss, that I am such a sneaking cove as to want money for helping a poor young girl out of the clutches of an old rascal such as this here duke," said Mr. Hopkins, indignantly. 'Why I'd be ashamed to take a stiver. I'll help you out of the house in a jiffy, for I has a spite against the duke, and for the matter of that, against Mr. Jones into the bargain, seeing they both had the impudence to cast sheep's eyes at Eliza here."

"Bless your heart, Hopkins, it ain't no use talking," interposed Eliza. "I'd be very glad, I'm sure, if you'd help the poor lady off. But what can you do? What's one against half-a-dozen? Not that I think that ere brute of a Jones would fight, but the footmen and grooms and stable boys would, and what could you do against half-a-dozen?"

"I don't mean fightin'," said Mr. Hopkins, "though for that matter, Eliza my dear, I shouldn't be afraid of any on 'em, one at a time, cause I've learned boxing above a bit. But we'll manage the thing quieter. We'll take 'em by what the millingtary calls a stracksgem. Isn't my wedding suit lying there what I brought to show yer to-night?"

"Yes, Hopkins, dear, and a beautiful suit it is," answered Eliza. "A real handsome blue coat, Regency colour, and brass buttons, white weskit, and white kerseymere not-to-be-nameds, just fit for the old duke himself, though for that matter he couldn't get into them, being such a burly old chap, and you a nice thin little feller. But what's your wedding suit got to do with this young lady?"

"That's the very thing, Eliza," returned the grocer, jumping up and exhibiting a smart, well-made, and, as his betrothed called it, "trim" little figure, about the same height as that of the graceful Maud, for a little man would make a tall woman.

"That's the very thing," repeated Mr. Hopkins, exultantly. "I am a little man, rather, I am; and it will be the jolliest spree out for the young lady to put on my weddin' suit, hat and all, which I've got a rale cocked hat, you know, what she can wear 'fore and aft' as the Jack tars say. Then you can go down through the hall with her; you always let me out, and you can kiss her at the door, and then she can make off back to her friends, and I'll get out afterwards over the garden wall, which the young lady wouldn't manage no how."

"It's not a bad plan," said Eliza. "I could let you out into the garden easy, bye-and-by, cause they'll all go to bed, or at any rate, not be a watching at the back of the house; but the garden wall is tremendous high, it is. However will you get down on the other side of it?"

"Never you fear for that," answered Hopkins. "You get me some cord, or take down them bell-ropes, which I can knot together and fasten to one of them poplars close to this side the wall, and I'll get down safe enough 'tother side."

This plan was finally agreed upon; and poor Maud was too happy at the prospect of escaping from the house to hesitate long at assuming Mr. Hopkins's male attire, though she objected to it at first.

She resolved not again to return to the house of Lady Fitzwalter, but cast her fortunes along with those of her sister Elinor.

She made this resolve, not doubting that Lady Fitzwalter was privy to the base designs of the Duke of Alcaster.

Maud was, of course, ignorant of the two catastrophes of the night—the sudden and unprovided death of the wretched Lady Fitzwalter; and the burglary at her sister's house, in Epping Forest, ending with the abduction of Florence.

She retired, then, with the kind Eliza to her bedroom, and, laying aside the superb costume she had worn, as one of Queen Elizabeth's maids of honour, she donned the masculine garb.

"Really, miss," said Eliza, when the young lady stood before her so transformed, "you do make a real beautiful young man, and no mistake. But take your jewels with you, miss; they will be of use to you: and tell me where I shall bring this beautiful dress you have took off."

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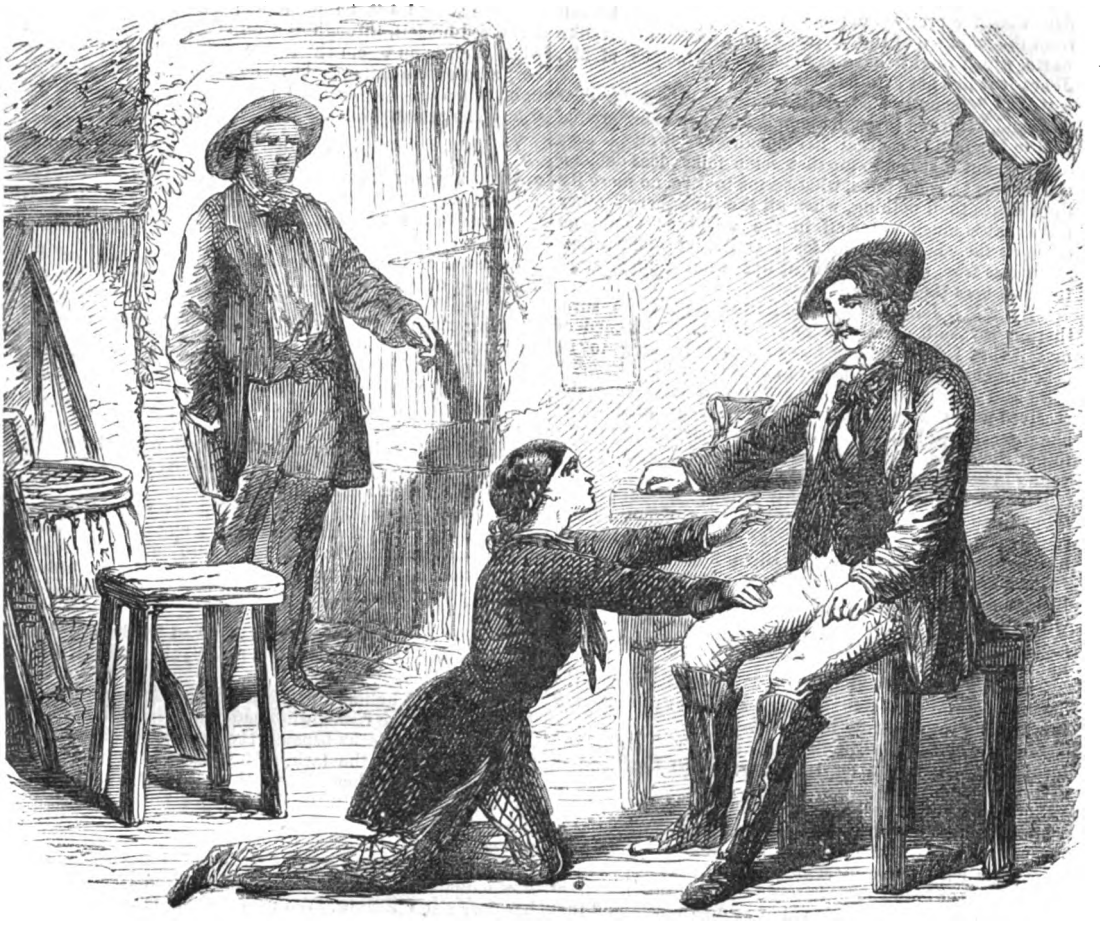

MAUD ESCAPING IN MALE ATTIRE FROM BURTON

The question set poor Maud again weeping, and she asked herself where she was to find shelter for the night, or how she should proceed to such a distance at that hour of the night.

Maud had all the helplessness of a feeble-minded woman, bred in luxury.

The honest and goodnatured Hopkins, on this point, came again to her assistance.

He had an uncle, he said, who lived about a mile further down the road.

He's a goodhearted old chap," he said, "and I am sure will gladly give you shelter for the rest of the night which is pretty far gone, you can't mistake the house Miss, its a pretty white cottage all growed over with honeysuckle, with green shutters, and green palings round the garden, and a pigeon house, and it's the third house as you'll come to on the road atwixt this and Edgware."

Maud thanked the young man most heartily, and taking an emerald ring from her finger insisted that Eliza should accept it as a wedding present.

It was then settled that so soon after her escape as was prudent, Mr. Hopkins should leave the house and follow her to that of his uncle, where she was to stay till his arrival.

The young man promised also that he would in the morning procure her a conveyance to her sister's house at Epping.

Maud then with a beating heart followed Eliza down to the hall.

The cocked hat had been carefully placed on her head so as to shadow her countenance, and the high insightly collar and cravat which the Regent had brought into fashion, helped also the disguise.

Eliza chatted gaily with her supposed lover, as she led the way.

The trustworthy Mr. Jones, was as well as the porter nodding in a large arm chair in the hall,

Like a surly mastiff, howerer, he roused up at the approach of Eliza and Maud, whose bright figure so closely resembled that of the obnoxious grocer, that Mr. Jones in a paroxysm of jealousy roared out to the porter to open the house door, and was driven almost to madness by the idea of the loud kiss with which the cruel and cunning Eliza favoured Maud at the parting.

"For," argued the deceitful fair one, "Mr. Jones

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knows very well, as Hopkins would not leave me at the door without a kiss, so it stands to reason that I and the young lady must part very loving or he will suspect that something's up."

Poor Maud in her impatience to be gone was less prudent than the pretty housemaid, and extricated herself from the embrace of the latter with a very unlover-like haste, which might have excited the suspicions of Mr. Jones if it had not gratified his spleen.

"Well," he exclaimed, as Eliza having closed the door on Maud, returned through the hall with her handkerchief held to her face to conceal her laughter, "well I says nothing, but it seems to me that some folks does demean themselves to some folks, what seems to care no more for their kisses than nothing, when all the time there's other folks that is much better off in the world as would go down on their blessed knees for a smile, let alone a nice sweet kiss from them honey fruit lips what might tempt the very bees themselves."

"Laws Mr. Jones how you do flatter a gal to be sure, there n w take it quietly do now. If I aint ashamed of myself that I am to let you kiss me, and I going to be asked in church with Hopkins next Sunday."

So said the deceitful Eliza, as with real reluctance she received a kiss from the purple lips of Mr. Jones, only, as she protested to Hopkins, when she got back to her room, to put the old wretch off all suspicion, and allow the poor young lady more time to get away.

"That was all very well," answered the honest grocer, "but I don't chose that ere flunkey of a Jones should touch your lips nohow, and were as eggs is eggs, I'll pay him out for a daring to kiss you Eliza."

Poor Maud, meanwhile, little heading of ought but the blessed consciousness of her escape from a place which, with all its luxury, was to her an abode of horror, fled along the road towards Edgware with the speed of a hunted hare.

The grey streaks of the dawn which had relieved the darkness of the sky after the moon went down, were now brightening into the rosy flush of day.

Maud paused unwillingly, panting for breath, and looking eagerly round for the house which Hopkins had described to her.

She had not yet reached it, but in the direction from which she had fled she perceived a gentleman walking at a rapid pace, and evidently looking from side to side as if in expectation of meeting some person.

The fears of Maud immediately suggested that her flight from the Duke of Alcester's villa was discovered, and that this was some one of his emissaries dispatched in pursuit of her.

So with speed increased by terror, she hurried forward. Turning her head after she had run near a quarter of a mile, she found he was following her with a rapidity that made it certain she was really the object of his pursuit.

This conviction gave wings to the footsteps of Maud. She forgot the shame which she had at first experienced at the thought of presenting herself to the uncle of the young man, Hopkins, in male attire, and uttered an exclamation of thankfulness at a turn in the road, as her eyes lighted on the welcome honeysuckle covered cottage with the pigeon house in the garden, which Hopkins had described.

The sun was high up in the heavens, and the birds gaily carolling on the trees.

The vicinity of Edgware, in those days, was rural, and the inhabitants of the district had rural habits; they rose and retired with the sun.

Maud uttered an ejaculation of thankfulness; the garden gate stood open, so did the house door, and the country breakfast of brown bread, bacon, milk, and new laid eggs, was spread on the table, at which set the master of the cottage.

Maud did not heed that a man, habited as a farm labourer, stood on the threshold, she rushed past him, and falling at the feet of the venerable looking old man, who sat at the breakfast table, she implored his protection and assistance for a persecuted woman, quite forgetful of her male attire.

The old man, whose genial character, his nephew, the grocer, had not overrated, himself raised Maud, and before even she mentioned the name of his relation, answered that she should not be molested; and Maud had scarce recovered herself, through the relief of a burst of tears, when the person whom she had caught sight of pursuing her, entered the cottage; but who shall describe her delight, when in the dreaded pursuer, she recognised the young clergyman—Gerald Warburton.

CHAPTER LXI.

FLORENCE AND LADY BESS.—THE STORY OF THE MYSTERIOUS PICTURES.—ARRIVAL OF SIR MILES CRESSINGHAM.—STRANGE INTERVENTION FOR THE RESCUE OF FLORENCE.

THE horror of the strange dream which visited her the first night of her sojourn at the old house on the Blackwater, weighed heavily on her spirits on the following morning, though she strove to shake off what she considered a feeling of superstition.

A bright and balmy morning succeeded to the stormy night; and when Florence, on rising, threw open her chamber window, a wild but enchanting prospect met her eyes.

Immediately below her chamber window lay the small park attached to the house, where the trees and shrubs flourished in unpruned luxuriance.

To the right of the house lay the river; and over a wild mass of rocks, flashing like silver among the verdure of the trees which had struck their gnarled roots into the cliffs, leaped the cascade, the roar of whose waters, lashed into fury by the storm, had struck the ear of Florence on the preceding night.

In the distance the prospect was closed by the waves of the German ocean, where it was met by the rapid streams of the Blackwater.

No sound of human life disturbed that sylvan solitude. The cawing of the rooks, who made their home in a magnificent clump of oaks beneath the chamber of Florence; the sweet note of the lark, as he soared high up in the morning sun; and the belling of the deer, as they skimmed athwart the open lawns, were the only sounds of animate life that broke the monotonous murmur of the winds and waves.

Tears fell from the eyes of Florence as she thought of how happily she could live with her belovod Herbert, and her dear sister Ellinor, even in such a scene as this.

But they were far distant; perhaps she would never see them more: and she was in the power of Sir Miles Cressingham, that most matchless villain.

Florence made a terrible resolve, she would die sooner than become the victim of Sir Miles; she would spring from the casement into the torrent that flowed below, or find some friendly steal to pierce her heart.

From this dismal reverie she was roused by the voice of Lady Bess, who issued grumbling from the closet where she had slept, and expressing a hope of the speedy arrival of Sir Miles Cressingham, which Florence so deeply dreaded.

From the few words uttered by this girl, Florence became aware that amid her depravity she prided herself on a sort of pernicious honesty towards her employers, whose behests, however wicked, she held herself bound to obey.

Sir Miles Cressingham was expected in the course of the day.

If Florence was to escape she must by her own unaided efforts.

Secret hiding places, and strange unsuspected modes of egress were, she knew, common in such ancient building as that in which she was immured.

Florence remembered all the incidents of her appalling dream.

In that mysterious vision she had seen the panel on which hung the picture of Sir Miles Cressingham's an-

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cestor slide back, and discover a narrow stair up which the body of the murdered lover had been borne.

Now if that dream had been a providential warning, how a mode of escape from the chamber were really hidden behind the picture.

Florence determined to avail herself of each moment of the absence of her female gaoler, for such she felt was Lady Bess, to examine the picture, and wainscot against which it hung.

An opportunity occurred when Lady Bess left the room to inquire about breakfast.

Her absence was as Florence had hoped it would be, much longer than was necessary, for Lady Bess neither liked the apartment in which Florence was immured nor the company of Florence herself.

There is nothing so unendurable to a depraved woman as contact with a virtuous member of her own sex.

Though nothing would have been kinder and more gentle than the manner of Florence. Bess felt the very knowledge of her purity a rebuke to herself.

Florence did not venture to approach the panel even when she heard Bess shoot the outer bolt of the yellow chamber into its place, but stood listening breathlessly at the door till the sound of the young woman's footsteps along the gallery died away in the distance.

Then Florence returned to the bedroom and eagerly began her investigations, for she knew that the young woman, if even she wished to dispatch her errand quickly, must still be absence some time, as she had to cross the entire length of the mansion, and the great entrance hall to reach the kitchen.

Happily for the search which Florence had to make, the bright sun of the summer morning streamed almost glarishly into the chamber, pouring a full flood of light on the mysterious picture.

In that brilliant lustre of the morn, the once splendid, but now decaying furniture, looked more dismal even than in the pale light of lamp and taper. Amber velvet, and satin, and tarnished fringes of gold and silver lace, looked especially melancholy and deplorable.

By the aid of one of the high-backed cumbrous chairs, Florence climbed to the top of a cabinet that stood against the wall, close to the picture.

She looked narrowly round the frame, but could not discover whether it was employed merely to conceal a door or recess, or whether there was the solid wainscot behind it.

The bottom of the picture was about three feet from the floor of the chamber, and as it was of life size, the top nearly reached the low ceiling.

Florence descended from her elevated position, and procured a table knife which had been left from the tray at supper. She had discovered a tiny crevice between the wainscot and the top of the picture frame which would admit the blade of the knife.

Using the knife as a lever, the slight strength of Florence was sufficient to force the upper part of the picture a little way away from the wall.

An exclamation of joy burst from her lips.

The particles of dust that rose from the aperture floated in a ray of light that crossed the sunbeam from the casement, and issued from some open space in the wainscot, probably from some loophole on a secret stair.

Florence drew out the knife and suffered the picture to fall back into its place.

She had discovered that there was a means of escape from that chamber concealed behind that picture, and she blessed providence for her fearful vision of the night, which she could not but think had been mercifully sent to guide her to rescue from the infamous Sir Miles.

Florence did not venture, at that time, to pursue her investigations further, as she expected each moment that Bess would return.

Great as was the joy of Florence when she first made this discovery, it was however checked on another reflection which suggested itself when Bess had returned and was setting forth a tempting breakfast.

That secret recess which afforded a means of escaping from the chamber equally furnished a mode of secretly entering it.

It was by the orders of Sir Miles that Florence had been imprisoned in that peculiar chamber; it was most improbable that he was not aware of the secret recess, and still more so, that knowing it he would not avail himself of it for the accomplishment of some deadly villany.

The heart of Florence throbbed with horror at this thought, but she was still thankful that she had discovered the recess, as against the danger which she suspected she might perhaps guard.

Lady Bess, who had been absent long enough to take her own breakfast, was very loquacious while she waited on Florence.

She had learned, she said, "the whole history of them horrid pictures."

"It was all true, miss," proceeded Lady Bess. "Old Maynard told me all about them while we was having breakfast. That black-faced sour-looking brute of a man, which you says is so like Sir Miles—and a beauty Sir Miles must be, if it's like him; which, to be sure, is nothing to do with the story: but, as I was saying, old Maynard says that e.e picture was of one of Sir Miles's family, what lived hundreds of years ago, as one can see by his dress. Well, this here man—Sir Marmaduke, old Maynard says he was called—falls in love with a beautiful young lady, just as Sir Miles now-a-days have done with you. But the young lady had a lover, which she did not choose to marry this Marmaduke for; and no wonder, seeing as her lover was a gay handsome young man, and Sir Marmaduke a very ugly old one. So she told her father as she wouldn't marry Sir Marmaduke, but would have her own lover, if she lived on bread and cheese, anp wore linsey-wolsey—which she would soon of got tired of, depend on it, miss, as she was used to satins and silks, as we may see by her pictures; and 'when poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window'—no truer saying than that. Howsomever, which this lady—Lady Edgar, Maynard says she was called—hadn't no chance of, 'cause her father was stern that she should marry her rich lover, instead of the poor one."

"So what does he do miss, but gets a heap of fine jewels, necklaces, and earrings, and bracelets, and broaches, and I don't know what, all made of diamonds, and pearls, and rubies, and things what Sir Marmaduke had brough as presents for her."

"And he says, the old father, I swear miss," he says "Evelyn, or daughter, or lady Evelyn, it doesn't matter much what he called her, he says, you see them there jewels, and you knows though I may dress you fine, to get you off to a rich husband, yet I am a poor man. Now them here jewels are only a part of the fine things as Sir Marmaduke's wife will wear. You know that he's very rich, and that you'll have coaches and horses, and gold, and servants, and carriages, and satins, and silks, and everything that's beautiful if you marry him. Now that ere boy, Philip Arundel, is very poor, he spends all he gets as being one of king Charles's guards, king Charles what lost his head miss he meant," said Bess, graciously giving Florence the historical information.

"Well, she went on as I was a saying, that the old man says, now I won't have no daughter of mine marry a chap what is obligated to spend all he gets in fine fal lals to wear at courts. So now you just take your choice, you marry's Sir Marmaduke, which will make a lady of you, or I just troops for over to France among the Papists and makes a nun on you, so make up your mind you has only this choice."

"Well miss, the poor thing was left to herself, and in course it were worse to be made a nun of than to marry Sir Marmaduke, cause why, a woman may throw a little dirt into the eyes of her husband, and even have a lover and he knew nothing about it; but them old sour uns, there aint no deceiving of. So the long and short of it was, that the poor creature married that black looking brute which she couldn't abide, and in course he knowed in his heart what a brute he was, which a beautiful lady couldn't, and so he was jealous and behaved to her worse

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nor a bear. Well, what comes next. She was walking in the woods below one day, for her husband keeps her locked up in this here horrid house, almost as bad as if she had been with them whey-faced old men, she was walking in the woods just where the great black looking beeches overhang the river, when who should start forwards and throw hisself at her feet except her old lover. A beautiful young fellow he was, the brute of a husband was no more to be compared to him than a farthing dip to the sun at noonday."

"Well, you may guess pretty well miss, how the matter ended, the lady cried, and the lover swore he would throw hisself into the river, and then the lady agreed to run away from her husband, and serve him right too. But do you think as he was to be done, no, he was one of them ere cunning coves as the devil himself can't be a match for. He was away from home when the lover and the lady met, and she never thinking as she had a hypocritical slimy snake among her servants more especially in her own maid lets him visit her at night in this here very chamber. The husband is told all about it, so he writes to her like a kind of a snaky crocodile as he was too, that he wasn't coming home for another week. So much the better says the poor soul to herself, so she begins on the quiet to pack up her jewels and fine clothes what she had come at so dearly by wedding of such a wretch, and she settles all with him two nights before the husband comes home. Now the lover in course never came to the house openly, the lady let him in through some sort of a passage nigh this chamber, while that ere old Maynard would not let me know whereabouts it was, but I'll find it ont and no thanks to him. Well, the husband suspected which way the lover comes to pay his visits, and he lies in wait for him one night with two cut throats what he kept in his pay, and they sat upon the poor young man, which of course he stood no chance against three, though he was as brave as a lion. At last the husband beat the sword out of his hand, one of them fellows stabbed him slyly in the back, and then he fell covered all over with wounds. Now, one might have though he would have been satisfied to see the poor young man lying pale and dead, and bleeding from his gaping wounds, one would have thought he would have had the poor corpse buried or hid away, or would at any rate have left him in the woods, and let the poor lady find out on the quiet that the poor young chap had been killed. I'm sure that would have contented the worst vagabond that I ever heard of, should'nt you have thought it would miss?"

"I should indeed," answered Florence, who had listened to this story in speechless horror, remembering all the incidents of her terrific dream. "But it did not, the barbarous husband required a worse revenge."

"There now!" exclaimed Lady Bess, in an accent of surprise,—"whoever would have thought that a young lady like you should fancy the husband could do worse than murder? Well, I supposes as it is your book-learning what has told you that rich people can be quite as wicked as the poor ones; but I don't think you can fancy what that ere horrid villin did."

"Something dreadful, no doubt," returned Florence. "Tell me—tell me if you know what was it!"

The young woman shivered, though the warm summer sunshine, that poured through the casements, made the apartments so warm, that Florence had opened them to admit the breeze.

"Why, miss," ejaculated Lady Bess, in a horrified whisper, and glaring around, as though she feared some hideous vision would present itself—"why, miss, he had the corpse of the poor young man brought up into this very room, and laid upon that very bed you slept on last night, and covered him, grim and gory as he was, with the fine lawn sheets and the satin counterpane—for the room had been furnished new and beautiful when he married the Lady Evlyn—and he laughed, and said, 'Why does not the lady come? Her lover is first at the meeting, and is waiting for her.' The room was all hung in those days with worsted stuff—'tappstry,' I think, old Maynard called it. So Sir Marmaduke and his ruffians hide themselves behind the tappstry, and wait till the poor lady trips into the room, smiling and beautiful, and all dressed out in her jewels and silks, 'cause she expects a visit from her lover. Sure enough, he had come to visit her; and they were never to part no more. So little did Lady Evlyn think of what was to come, that she was singing in a low tone, and she ran to the glass and fastened a stray curl, and altered the set of her jewels. Then she warmed her little white hands, that were all glittering with rings, at the fire, for it was the end of autumn and the weather was cold.

"Presently the lady got a little impatient, and went towards the secret door what she had given her lover the key of. She wondered he did not come, she was soon to find that he was waiting for her already."

She had to pass the bed to reach the door, at which she expected her lover to enter; and her foot slipped in something wet, and she felt the moisture through her little silk shoe; then, as she was going to ring a little hand-bell and scold her maid for having spilt water on the floor she perceived that it was blood that stained her shoe, and that it was smeared along the train of her white satin dress. A fear of something horrible entered her mind, though even then she did not suspect the truth. But she turned faint, and caught at the curtains of her bed to support herself. But when she dragged them aside, and saw that some person was lying in her bed, and pressed down the sheets and found them all stained with blood, and saw him whose warm kisses she had expected on her lips that night lying stark and stiff, and horrible to look at with his eyes wide open and staring at her through the film on them, the book down stairs, where Maynard read the story in, says that she gived the horridest shriek that ever was heard! Then the husband showed hisself, and laughed, and told her how he had killed her lover, and asked her would she like to keep company with him now."

"And what ensued then?" asked Florence, with trembling lips, for she remembered that her fearful dream had terminated as the murdered lover was laid upon the bed.

"Well, then, came the most horridest part of the business. But how pale you looks, Miss Amery, and you havn't eaten no breakfast, take a glass of wine; I am going to have one."

And Lady Bess, suiting the action to the word, poured out two bumpers of Maderia, one of which Florence gladly took, for this horrid explanation of her dream oppressed her almost to fainting.

"Well, Miss Amery," pursued Bess, "the lady turned as it was natural she should do, to her husband, and she looked and spoke as much like a demon as he did! and her lover's dagger was left a sticking in his girdle, and she snatched at it, and stabbed herself before her husband could stay her hand, and then with her dying breath she called down curses on his head and those of all his race. And she swore that she would haunt him, and that day and night she would stand by his side, and sing in his ears of shame and ruin that should cling to his race so long as they remained on earth.

"And it all came true, and she did haunt Sir Marmaduke till the day of his death, which he was hanged, for being along of them as cut off the head of King Charles; so the saying of the dying lady came true for him, as she said he would be hanged, and so should the last of his race. And Maynard says the words as she spoke with her last breath was a kind of song, and is written down in a book what tells the whole story, and that it has come true ever since, and three Cressinghams have killed their wives, and two the wives have murdered; and the last of the race will be sure to be hanged.

"These are the verses Mr. Maynard said which the lady spoke when she was dying—

'While the wan moon governs the seething tide,
Shall the Cressingham slayer be slain by his bride;

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Betrayed or betrayer, shall Cressingham be,
While fire shall burn, and the winds blow free;
With the wronger or wronged, they must hold their place,
And the felon's doom tend the last of the race.' "

Florence shuddered as these rhymes of mystic meaning fell upon her ear, the worser part of the weird destiny of his family.

Was he not a black betrayer—and might he not be the felon of whom the prophecy spoke?

Florence remembered the circumstances of her unhappy father's death; she had shared in the darkest suspicious of Tim Hawkins, and thus it was not because she was powerless to prove those suspicions that she ceased to entertain them.

The awful story had made a great impression on Lady Bess. Uneducated and somewhat coarse minds are peculiarly susceptible to the influences of superstition, which sometimes is attended with the excellent results which reason and religion produce in a superior nature.

All the flippancy of the young woman's manner was gone, and it was almost with an aghast look that when Florence questioned her as to the life of the wretched Sir Marmaduke, that she replied—

"The Lady Evelyn was permitted to keep her oath, Miss Amery: she never left her coarse husband night or day, and the last words he spoke when the rope was round his neck, were that she was standing beside him still. Old Maynard says the doom has followed up the race. Sir Miles's cousin, Sir Wilfred, was one of the Cressinghams that was betrayed instead of betraying, his wife runned away from him, and though she did not kill him, he died of a broken heart."

Florence made no comment on this dark story; but she regarded with horror the prospect of passing another night in those apartments, the scene of so hidious a catastrophe, but she took especial care not to mention her appalling dream to Bess, as she apprehended that the young woman would then refuse to stay in those terrible apartments, from a solitary sojourn in which Florence shrank in an overwhelming horror.

The morning passed very cheerlessly.

Bess applied to old Maynard for permission to walk in the park, either in company with Florence, or by herself, and was peremptorily refused.

As she had very especial reasons for avoiding the company of the Spider, she then returned to the gloomy apartments occupied by Florence, sagely telling the young lady that she had always heard that "ghostes" did not like showing themselves to more than one person at a time, and that therefore if she staid with Florence they would be pretty safe against such unwelcome visitors.

"Circumstances," it is sagely observed, "alter cases," and although, under ordinary circumstances, Florence would have shrank from the society of Lady Bess, she was in her present position truly glad of it.

She even began to indulge some hope that Bess would assist her to escape, in spite of all protestations to the contrary; and was sitting down to dinner with her, in tolerable spirits, when footsteps were heard in the gallery, followed by the unlocking of the door, when old Maynard ushered into the room Sir Miles Cressingham.

All the fortitude of Florence gave way at the presence of her oppressor; and, uttering a deep sigh, she fell swooning into the arms of Lady Bess.

The Baronet put on pretended great alarm at this; but Bess, after he had assisted her to lay Florence on a sofa, roughly bid him quit the room.

"For she'll go off again, sir," said the young woman, "if she sees you, directly she opens her eyes."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE RECRUITS—TIM HAWKINS A SOLDIER—HERBERT MANDEVILLE—THE SEARCH AFTER FLORENCE—THE GIPSIES IN THE WOODS ON THE BLACKWATER.

The scene was the little town of Waldon; the actors, a recruiting sergeant, and a dozen or two of country lads, newly enlisted.

It was not for the gay cavalry, but for a hard-working infantry regiment, that the sergeant had enlisted his recruits.

The merry notes of the fife, and the rolling of the drum, were heard in the market-place; and the recruits were drawn up for inspection, when a young officer, with a sad and solemn brow, that seemed ill suited to his profession, stept from the principal inn, and, after going through the usual forms in examining the newly enlisted soldiers, turned, with an anxious look, to the sergeant.

"Have you gathered any further information, Holmes of those villians?" he said.

"Yes, Captain Mandeville," answered the sergeant. "William Rogers, that farming lad who joined yesterday, says that he knows both that a gang of gipsies were before seen there, having pitched their tents on the banks of the Blackwater, and also that a lady has been brought to Sir Miles Cressingham's house, where it is supposed she is kept under restraint, as she has not been seen in the park or gardens."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Herbert, "that I am on the track of the villian Sir Miles, I will rescue my precious Florence, or avenge her in the heart's blood of that felon baronet!"

A recruit, freshly attired in the regimental garb, at that moment approached Herbert.

This recruit bore himself so briskly, and walked and looked so well, that he might have passed for a well drilled soldier.

But Tim Hawkins, who had enlisted to be near to Herbert, was always a smart young fellow.

"Any news, sir, of Miss Florence and that ere villian, Sir Miles?" he inquired respectfully of Herbert, putting his hand to his cap in true military style.

"Yes, Hawkins," answered Mandeville. "We are on the right track at last, a lady has been, within the week, brought to a house which it seems Sir Miles has on the Blackwater, and as the embarkation of our men has been postponed for a week, I trust we shall be able to rescue Miss Amery and hand over Sir Miles to the punishments of the law, for he is too base to be worthy the sword of an honourable man."

"And shall we not set off at once, Captain Mandeville?" said Tim, eagerly.

"As soon as I have called on the magistrates here, Tim," answered Herbert, "for I will have the civil law to back the military, and shall take two or three of our fellows along with me to enforce the magistrates warrant for searching the house of Sir Miles."

"Ecod, captain," said the rustic, from whom the serjeant had gathered the information, "thee had better take care: it aint much that the wife-killing Cressinghams care for the justice of the peace, for it be main little they have to do with peace. Ecod, if he do hear as the sodgers and constables are after um, it wor just a trick of his race, to hide the poor young lady in some hole or dungeon of that ere bewildered house of his'n, or even cut her throat, that wor like a Cressingham."

These remarks of the rustic somewhat startled Herbert, and it was finally resolved that he and Tim should quietly reconnoitre the house at Blackwater, and only resort to the power of the law for the rescue of Florence if stratagem should fail.

An hour afterwards, Herbert Mandeville armed with a magistrates warrant and accompanied by Tim Hawkins a constable from Waldon, the recruit Rogers, and two veteran soldiers took the road to the banks of the Blackwater.

The information which Roger had given was in every respect correct, a party of gipses strange to the neighbourhood had taken up their abode in the roads near the moth of the Blackwater.

This party consisted of the unfortunate man Michael, alsely accused of the murder of the old servant at

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Ellinor Amery's cottage, his mother, and wife, and children.

The poor fellow was very sore at heart, not only because he deeply felt the calamity of being accused of a horrible crime of which he was was innocent, but for the blighting of his hopes of leading a life of honest industry.

It might perhaps have been better if Michael had surrendered himself and trusted to the chance of acquittal, as the finding of his knife lying in the blood of the murdered man.

But a wiser power than poor Michael, and one who did not labour under the disadvantage of belonging to a suspected race, might well have hesitated ere surrendering to answer so horrible a charge.

Michael had not the courage or foolhardiness, as it may perhaps be more justly termed to run the risk.

In addition to the loss of honest employment, poor Michael was now obliged to resort to the customary depredations of his race for the support of his family.

This he chiefly effected by snaring the game in the woods, for a description of him was out, and through the newspaper press of those days had scarce a shadow of its present importance, and the Bow-street runners, though active and acute, were by no means to be compared to our present detective police force, yet Michael knowing that the officers of the law were in chase of him, did not venture near any of the fine farmhouses, that were in a reasonably distance from the dreary woods on the Blackwater.

Michael had pitched his tent at no great distance from the lone house of Sir Miles Cressinham, and he was ignorant that it was the present abode, either of his own neice Jumping Jessy or Lady Bess as she was more frequently called, or of the ruffian who had received the cognomen of the Spider.

It was the same day as that on which Sir Miles Cressingham arrived at the house on the Blackwater, and Herbert had obtained the clue to Sir Miles as the author of the outrage on the liberty of Florence.

The gipsy family had had rather a scanty breakfast of wood pigeons and water cresses, for Michael had been unfortunate in setting his snares on the preceding day, and three of them were broken.

He had hitherto refrained from firing the fowling piece with which he was provided, for he was fearful of the report attracting attention. The woods, however, were so very solitary that Michael thought he would venture to shot at some of the deer who found a covert in the woods.

After the early breakfast then taken, ere the sun had reddened the topmost branches of the beech and oak, or the dew dried upon the grass, Michael threw his musket over his shoulders and plunged into the deep covert of the woods.

He had wandered in the green shades for about an hour, careless in his abstraction of the purpose which had brought him there, when a noble stag suddenly sprang from a dense copse to the right of the path which Michael was pursuing.

The rustling of the leaves, and the form of the graceful creature as it darted past him, awakened the gipsy's attention; he placed his musket to his shoulder and fired.

The poor animal received the shot in his flank, sprang forwards, and bounding over a green eminence shadowed by an ancient oak, suddenly disappeared.

Michael ran forwards. certain that the stag was mortally wounded, he expected to find it lying on the other side of the hillock.

His surprise then was great, when he found that it had fallen down a kind of chasm that yawned below the oak, which was apparently a very aged tree.

This chasm, to the greater wonder of the gipsy, seemed as if had been newly made; as though a thin crust of earth, covered with turf, had covered it, and had given way under the hoofs of the wounded deer.

Michael was not disposed to lose his spoil, for the buck was a fine one, and would support his family for some time; he therefore set himself to consider how he could haul it up from the pit into which it had fallen.

Stooping down, he found that the depth of this pit, where the stag had fallen, was not above ten or fifteen feet, and with the ready contrivance of a man whose life had been spent in the woods, he tore from the trunks of the trees and the thickets around some strong withes of the parasites which flourished there so luxuriantly, and quickly converted them into tough ropes capable of sustaining a heavy weight.

On examination, Michael also found that it was immediately at the foot of the oak that the ground had given way, and the long suckers depended over the aperture.

Swinging on one of these suckers, the gypsey swang himself down into the pit.

He then tied the four feet of the deer, which was lying dead, with the ropes which he had made, and secured them also about the antlers, and was about to ascend from the cavity, when, on turning his head, he found that it was not merely at the foot of the tree that the earth was hollowed; but that, beyond the orifice made by the fall of the deer, there stretched away a dark narrow passage, which art or nature had cut through the solid ground.

By stooping a little, Michael could walk along this passage; and not only curiosity, but the hope of finding some retreat in which he might be hidden from the officers of the law, in case of their pursuing him to the woods on the Blackwater, induced the gipsey to explore this passage.

To his profound astonishment, it widened and became more lofty as he advanced; and presently a pale light like a star, glimmered in the distance.

This light grew stronger and the passage more lofty till the gipsey reached an extensive vault, in which, depending from the roof, burned the lamp, the light of which he had seen in the distance.

Athwart one end of this vault was a curtain of purple cloth, to the right was a flight of steep stairs. The curiosity of Michael led him first to ascend these stairs.

They were closed at the summit by a trap secured with strong bolts, which however were not drawn; and pushing up this trap he found himself, to his astonishment, in the court-yard of a ruined house.

The building appeared to have been originally somewhat pretentious.

It was built of stone, was three stories in height, and stood upon a rocky eminence, overlooking the Blackwater.

The house appeared to have been rendered uninhabitable by fire, as was denoted by the charred rafters, and the smoke that had blackened the dismantled casements.

That of the outer wall of the house had fallen, and the staircase partially burned, was suspended as it were in mid air.

Michael entered the ground floor apartments, they showed no trace of having been lately inhabited, and yet the lamp he had seen burning in the vault below, denoted that the place was not wholly forsaken.

The gipsy climbed the steep shaggy rocks with arbutus and holly that over hung the river.

He was able from them to command an extended prospect both up and down the river.

The home was surrounded by a thick grove of beech and elm that embosomed and almost concealed it.

This secluded place would have made an excellent abode for the gipsy's family, but there was the light in the vaults below, and he determined further to examine these vaults.

It could be for no honest purpose that the vaults were illumined, and the new trap and stiff bolts affixed to the summit of the narrow stair.

Smugglers or robbers had no doubt taken possession of the place, and the unfortunate gipsy hunted out of the pale of society which he had hoped to enter, had no choice but to join the company of these who like himself were under the ban of the law.

He returned to the trap, raised it and descended the narrow stair, and found himself again in the vault.

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He drew aside the curtain and a scene of dazzling splendour met his eyes.

The grating which the purple curtain had concealed was gilded, and the apartment which it separated from the outer vault was fitted up in a style of the most gorgeous luxury.

A lady magnificiently attired in a purple robe heavily embroidered with gold, was sadly leaning her head upon her hand, when some slight noise made by the gipsy in withdrawing the curtain roused her from her melancholy reverie.

She immediately rose clasping her hands together with a dismal cry, and exclaiming—

"He comes, my master, my tyrant, my master to torture me with his horrible carresses, oh, why have I not the courage to die."

Then as the woman turned her head, and beheld not the same which she so feared and hatred but the features of the gipsy Michael, her exclamations of suffering were converted to a shriek of joy, and she rushed forwards crying in tones frantic and trembling with hope.

"Oh, Michael, Michael, good dear friend, what chance has brought you here? Has Hamet, that fiend, that murderer, at last relented? Will he release me from this odious place and from his dreadful love? But no, Hamet is a devil that will never know relenting, blacker and more treacherous than the sovereign fiend himself. Haste then, dear Michael undo this dreadful grating, the fastenings are on that side, the wretch has boasted to me many a time that if I had a friend could find the way to the place in which you stand I might be easily released. And then he has gibbered and mocked at me, the black fiend, and told me that I was a life prisoner—that none would ever find me out."

While Caroline Andrews spoke thus, for it was to the gorgeous prison of that unfortunate woman that chance had conducted the gipsy, he, though lost in amazement was eagerly feeling for the fastening of the grating.

It consisted of a kind of spring bolt, on which, fortunately, the gipsy pressed his hand; the gilded gate flew back, and Caroline, with an hysterical shriek of joy, rushed into the outer vault.

In the intimacy which prevails among the Pariahs of society, Caroline had become acquainted with the gipsy, of whose kindness to poor Reuben she was aware.

"Take me away at once, Michael; hide me from Hamet. I will reward you well," gasped the poor woman. Her neck, her bosom, her hair was sparkling with jewels.

Snatching off a bracelet of diamonds, she endeavoured to force it on the gipsy.

"Take this, Michael, it will be a fortune for your wife and little ones; but oh, take me away—take me away at once."

The gipsy was not unacquainted with the value of jewels, and the diamonds that adorned the bracelet were of so pure a water that they shone like sunbeams in the dark vault.

The heart of poor Michael beat high with hope: those superb gems would indeed make an ample provision for his wife and children.

"God be thanked for the chance that brought me here, Caroline!" said the man, with fervour, and seizing her hand, he was proceeding toward the staircase that terminated in the courtyard of the ruined house.

The young woman shrunk back with a cry of dismay.

"No, no," she exclaimed, "you led me to destruction. Those stairs—was it by them that you entered this place? If we ascend them now we may encounter Hamet, for it is near the time when he comes to curse me with his presence. Oh, is there no other way out of this horrid place?"

Then Michael remembered the pit into which the stag had fallen, and fearing the fierce Malay little less than the woman herself, he hurried her into the dark passage.

Scarcely however had they quitted the open vault, hen the heavy fall of the trap door was heard, followed, the next minute, by a yell of wildest fury in the voice of Hamet.

He had discovered the open grating.

He had no idea, however, that Caroline had received assistance in her escape. He thought the spring that secured the grating had accidently given way, and that his unfortunate captive was hiding in the subterranean way which he supposed to be without any outlet, as he was of course ignorant of the falling in of the earth at the root of the old oak.

He rushed madly down the subterranean cavern, but groped slowly along in the darkness. Michael, whose eyes had been accustomed to it, was able to keep well in advance of him.

"Caroline," shouted the Malay—"my queen-bird of beauty, my life, my soul—come back to me! Caroline, I will slay myself if you do not come back—I will pour out my heart's blood. Oh! the heart that loves you so. Oh! Caroline, I know that you are hiding here. Come back, my love—come back!

Then the mood of the fierce lover changed.

"Oh! traitoress," he cried, gnashing his teeth, "you think in vain to escape me. I will find you—I will get a light. Ha, ha!—a light, a light; and then, Caroline, I will drag you back to your chamber, and you shall die—you shall die—you shall not torture me longer. It's your heart shall pour forth its blood—that hard pitiless heart, that gives poor Hamet hatred for all his love. And then a light! Yes, Caroline, you shall have a more glorious funeral pile than was ever ascended by the widows of my country. I will set fire to your rich chambers, Caroline; and I will die with you. Ha, ha! die, Caroline—die. Will you come forth at once—will you smile on wretched Hamet, and save him and yourself?

Insane with strangely mingled love and hate, the miserable Oriental paused, and listened eagerly after the last words; then his quick sense of hearing caught the sound of footsteps retreating in the distance, and, with a cry of fury, he rushed back for a lamp.

Meantime, with faint gasping breath, trembling with the extremity of terror, Caroline grasping with frenzied earnestness the hand of Michael the gipsy, had reached that part of the subterranean passage where the light of day shone through from the aperture near the ancient oak.

The free air of heaven was once more inbaled by the poor prisoner, and in another minute she had sunk half insensible with mingled joy and apprehension on the body of the slain stag.

Michael spent no time in words, he cut the withes from the animal and fastened them round the woman's waist.

Then with a bound he caught at impending roots of the oak and swung himself out of the pit, he had kept the end of the rope that was fastened to Caroline's waist in his left hand, while he laught at the oak with his left.

His next care was to draw the young woman out of the pit, and having collected her scattered senses she had risen, and was as much as possible aiding the gipsy, when a loud cry was heard, and Hamet appeared, holding in one hand a lamp, which looked pale in the light of the bright morning in the other his naked yataghan.

Happily for Caroline the rope that supported her was strong and Michael's presence of mind unshaken.

Unheeding the savage voice of the Malay, he steadily drew the woman up to the mouth the of pit. The Malay literally frantic with rage, made a sweeping blow with the yataghan at his mistress, but it caught only a fold of her dress as she stooped upon the firm ground about the cavity.

The findly tempered weapon severed the silken robe as if he had been a resisting substance, and a portion of the garment floated off on the summer air, while the wearer escaped injury.

The fierce passions of the wild Oriental were however now decreed to work out for himself a strange and terrible doom.

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The ground in the cavity was loose and gave no secure footing in consequence of being strewed with the earth that had fallen in when the stag broke through.

The light mould on which the Malay trod gave way beneath him,as he made that furious lunge at his mistress and he fell forwards still grasping the weapon.

The Malay fell on his face, and drawing back his arm in a natural movement to save himself, the keen edge of the yataghan crossed his throat as he fell, severing flesh and muscle, even the carotid artery, as if with the stroke of a razor.

One terrible gurgling cry, like that of a drowing person, rose from the pit, then Hamet lay perfectly still, with his blood soaking through the earth.

The gipsey had paused to load his musket, so soon as he had extricated Caroline, bidding her fly for her life. But the catastrophe of the Malay was almost instantaneous; and she had fled fifty paces when Michael called her back: he saw that some accident had happened to the Malay, but was not aware of its precise nature.

Finding that the man did not move, and at length seeing a stream of blood flowing from beneath him, Michael descended into the chasm.

He lifted up the body but the Malay was quite dead!

Caroline Andrews was released for ever from her terrible lover, and the murder of poor Jane was avenged!

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE DEMEANOUR OF SIR MILES—THE SERPENT AND HIS PREY—STORY OF LADY BESS.

An elegant dinner was prepared at the house on the Blackwater, for Sir Miles and his fair prisoner.

When the repast was ready he sent a respectful message to Florence requesting that she would honor him with her company.

A request so made, from a man who held her in his power, was equivalent to a command; and Florence unwillingly descended to the dining-room—a fine old apartment, on the ground floor.

Sir Miles rose on her entrance, and, taking her hand, which trembled and turned cold in his grasp, led her to the luxuriously spread table.

He expressed his hope that she had recovered from her late indisposition: then, in accents that shook with real or simulated emotion, he said:

"Why am I so odious to you, Florence? I have not hitherto been repulsed as hateful by any member of your sex. It is terrible to see you swoon in my presence, as though I were something loathsome and abhorrent to humanity."

"Sir Miles," answered Florence, "you are not abhorrent to me, in the sense that you imply. Had it not pleased you to persecute me with your love, I should have been happy to number you among my friends; and the idiosyncracy which urges a man who might, upon the ground of his own position and merits, find favour with the fairest of my sex, to force his love upon a woman so inferior as I am to many whom you might win, is something that I cannot understand."

"There are none superior to you, sweet Florence; you are a goddess among women, fair as Venus, and chaste as Diana. Ah, Florence, it is because you repulse, perhaps, that I love you with this absorbing passion."

"Do not talk of love, Sir Miles," or pollute its sacred name by applying it to so unreasoning and perverse a passion as that which influences your conduct. You violate every law of God and man, you plunge myself and my unfortunate sisters into poverty, you tear me from my betrothed on the eve of our nuptials, and then you blaspheme the holiness of love by naming love as your excuse. No, Sir Miles Cressingham, you ner loved me."

"I will prove that I do love you, sweet Florence," answered Sir Miles, "by ceasing to molest you with my suit till my devotion has won from you a return of my love—for, charming Florence, you must learn to love me, but now we will, for the present, speak no more on the subject."

Sir Miles then led Florence to the elegantly appointed table, and during the repast, and while old Maynard was in attendance, he exerted his natural wit and captivation of manner so successfully that poor Florence was almost won to a momentary forgetfulness of his injustice.

Meanwhile, in the servant's hall, Lady Bess had encountered the confidential servant of Sir Miles, the man Burrell, who had been present at the death of Crazy Jane, and who there, out of his numerous aliases, had adopted the name of Atkins.

The man started and turned slightly pale as he encountered Lndy Bess, who, on her part, nodded her head and laughed in an impudent, provoking manner, saying—

"You appear to know me, my friend, but I don't think we ever met before. I should not have forgotten you if we had, you are so handsome, you know."

Lady Bess laughed so as to show all her white teeth as she said this, for Mr. Burrell was most unaccountably ugly.

"Well, I don't know, miss," he stammered out, looking very pale and somewhat frightened; "in course I must not go contradict a lady, but I could have sworn that we had met before, aye, and knowed each other very well, too," added Mr. Burrell, growing bolder.

Lady Bess darted at him a most vixenish look, and the threatening glance of her black eyes.

"We never met in all our born days, before this very minute; now make yourself sure of that, my man, it will be best for you," she said.

Then throwing another roguish glance at him, she tripped off, singing the refrain of a popular air.

On her way to the apartments occupied by herself and Florence, she met the man Jenkins.

The door of a small parlaur was standing conveniently open, and she beckoned the man into it.

The Spider rubbed his hands and grinned, as Bess, after looking carefully about for eaves-droppers, closed the door.

This was the first time that the virago beauty had favoured him with a private interview.

There was nothing amorous however in the demeanour of Lady Bess, on the contrary her face expressed a stern and savage determination that sat strangely on the small piquante features.

Every particle of colour too had fled out from her cheeks, only but from her lips which were firmly compressed, while her black eyes glittered with the fire of a tiger's when on the spring.

"Spider," said Lady Bess, in a tone which had little to do with the tender import of the words, "you want me to believe that you are in love with me, don't you."

"Pretend!" ejaculated the Spider in a fawning voice, "why there's no pretend at all about it Bess. I loves you afore any body in the whole 'varsal world, many's the time as I have wished that Mrs. Jenkins and that ere stuck up swell of a Gentleman Harry were safe under the mould in the churchyard, and no small mind have I about helping to put them there, if so be I could think you would show a kinddess to me my beauty, when they was once out of the way."

"I don't care about them," answered Lady Bess, "I don't stick out for the parson and the ring Spider, and if so be as I like to take up with you, why I should not want you to cut your wife's throat for I pity her poor creature, nor to blow Gentleman Harry's brains out; because I can dissolve partnership with him on the quiet, and he is a pleasant good looking young fellow what can have his pick and choice among the blossoms any day."

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THE BARK THAT BEARS THE PRISONER TO LIBERTY.

"Oh yes, we know all about that," responded the Spider viciously "he's a fine gentleman he is."

"Yes, he is quite a gentleman," said Lady Bess coolly, "and the fact is this Spider, he's getting to be too fine a gentleman for me. He is cranky and hippish, Gentleman Harry is, and he won't do this, and he turns up his nose at that, and he talks fit for a cull of a parson, about the other, and the long and the short of it is, Gentleman Harry hasn't pluck enough to go on suiting me, for I have something to be done that requires a man who won't be scared by the spatter of a few drops of blood."

The greenish grey eyes of the Spider almost sparkled with the light of malice and cruelty that came with them.

"What is it my beauty, what is it?" he almost gasped in his eagerness. "I'll cut a hundred throats, I'll smash a hundred heads if you will smile on me, and pay me with a sweet sweet sugared kiss."

"When you have done my bidding, Spider—when you have done my bidding," returned Bess, drawing back from the man, as with a vile expression he approached his loathsome countenance to hers.

In the strength of her horrible purpose, however, she managed to hide the disgust with which the ugly and brutal wretch inspired her.

"I have a deed to be done," she said, "which is for the doing of a man, not a fantastic prig of a fine gentleman such as Harry. I want a man killed, Spider—killed!"

"And I am the man who will kill fifty men at your bidding, Bess," exclaimed the Spider.

"It is one man only that I want killed," answered Bess. "A man that I hate worse than the devil's hate. A man whose lies and whose malice destroyed me, Spider, when I was a bright happy girl; oh, so happy, so happy as I was until ruined by the malice of that wretch; and innocent too. I was then so happy, perhaps, because I was innocent. You wonder, Jenkins, that I talk of innocence; you don't understand it—never had, I suppose, don't remember such a feeling; but there is innocence—it exised man, it exists! and oh, how I will be revenged on the wretch who robbed me of it—how I will be revenged!"

The woman uttered the last words in a choking guttural accent, between her clenched teeth. Then she threw herself back in her chair, drew a deep breath, and remained silent.

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The Spider was surprised, and perhaps a little frightened at a demeanour on the part of this young woman such as he had never witnessed in her before.

He had supposed her only an impudent wanton, he had found her now a resolute, reflective, and ferocious being, brooding over some bygone injury, and obstinate for a deadly revenge.

Her silence perplexed and annoyed him, and he broke it by saying in an almost timid accent—

"Well, Lady Bess, and what is it I am to do?"

"Decoy this man—I will point him out—to some secret place, which I will also show you," answered Lady Bess, "and then kill, kill him!"

"I will be ready for the deed," said the man, working his fingers convulsively, as though they already encircled his purposed victim's neck.

"Yes," answered Bess, "but we must settle beforehand how it is to be done. Understand, Spider, I hate this monster so, that I would as soon let him live as die some sudden and almost painless death."

"You want to taunt him a bit, I suppose, afore he's to die," said the Spider, with a fiendish grin.

"Yes, I would gloat over his agony; watch the terror that will palsy his accursed frame."

With wild energy and fierce angry gesture, Bess continued, almost unconscious of the presence of her amorous yet detested companion.

"Oh, I will pay him for the blight he has caused to fall on my young life—for the life of guilt he has made me wade through since. He shall die, but not till hope within him die first."

The Spider looked on in silent amazement, and his eyes greedily drank in the beauty of the enraged tigress, as with nostrils dilated and eyes sparkling like coals of fire, she gave vent to her concentrated fury.

At last he spoke—

"Well, you do look fine," and again he ogled her with a glance meant to be affectionate.

"Now, that's enough of that; let us have no nonsense till the deed is accomplished."

"Right you are, Bess; but a fellow must sometimes express the feelings of his heart."

"Well, that will do now," said Bess, with a look of ineffable disgust.

Then in a few hurried whispers she told the Spider the plan she had conceived.

He listened, and when she had concluded he promised faithfully to do her bidding.

"And now for the present farewell," said Lady Bess, turning hastily away. "To-morrow night I shall expect you."

"Won't you let a fellow have one kiss?" cried the Spider, in a maudlin tone. "Only one—"

But she was gone—and the Spider was alone.

CHAPTER XLIV.

ALICE AND THE PRINCE REGENT.—THE CRISIS.—THE ESCAPE.

As the coach that contained Alice and the Prince darted through the green lanes leading towards Wimbledon, the turmoil and excitement that had hitherto held the sway over Alice's mind gave place to calm and earnest reflection.

The moonlight bathed the surrounding country in light, and as her eyes wandered to the shining orb she heaved a sigh. Could she be dreaming, or were the scenes she had just passed through tangible and real?

A soft pressure of her hand suddenly startled and brought her back to remembrance.

Yes, it was too true. The dance and revelry—love and death—and now the Prince was beside her bearing her to his villa; pouring passionate and honied language into her ear; leading her from virtue to infamy.

Again the Prince pressed the hand that lay passive within his own.

"Adorable Alice, why art thou silent?" said the Prince. "Do not let that old woman's death sadden my sweet one's heart."

Alice only sighed.

"Dearest, one word," murmured the Prince.

"Whither are we going?" tremblingly inquired Alice.

"To my villa at Wimbledon, dearest; do you not remember?"

"Ah! yes, but—" and with some slight bewilderment she put her hands to her brow and stopped speaking.

At this moment the coach arrived at its destination, and without a word the Prince sprang out and firmly but gently drew Alice after him.

Alice gazed like one in a dream on entering that abode of love and luxury.

Gorgeously and voluptuously decorated, it seemed indeed well suited for the purposes to which it was devoted.

On reaching the principal room, Alice found that a select party were awaiting the Prince's arrival.

Some half dozen of the Sheridan school—gay, witty, yet profligate, enlivened with the society of as many lovely but abandoned women.

Alice blushed as she entered, and at once comprehended the character of the scene and its actors.

Ere she could retrace her steps or even pause in her progress, the beautiful frail ones sprang forward to welcome her.

They showered compliments and flatteries upon her head. They proffered kindnesses and attentions on her they knew would for a time be their queen.

Bewildered and fatigued, Alice begged that she might be excused joining in the banquet that had been prepared for them.

The Prince's glances followed her form as she retired, then turning to the company, he cried, "I give a toast—the peerless Alice," and filling his glass he drank it off at a draught, the others following his example.

Fast and joyous sped the hours with those engaged at the feast, and Bacchus ruled the company at last.

In the meantime Alice had been shown to a chamber splendidly furnished.

Bidding the attendant leave her, she sank down on a seat and gave herself up to thought.

"What can all this mean?" she murmured. "Am I indeed sinking to the lowest depth that woman can sink to. Oh, heavens! it cannot be. And yet he says he loves me. Surely he cannot be so base as to rob a poor defenceless girl of honor; he who is so peerless—so noble?"

The distant sound of the revelry smote her ears. She could distinguish the sound of that voice that had whispered such soft music into her own ears, above all others in boisterous and unseemly mirth. Her own name she caught once or twice mingled in the shouts.

A blush of shame and indignation mantled her cheek, and she muttered firmly—

"Thank heaven I am not lost yet! Though he is my prince yet I scorn his favour. So he thinks so lightly of me. Ah! he is mistaken." A look of scorn flashed from the eye of the proud and angry woman.

Tired and worn out, at last she yielded to nature's request and sank into slumber as she sat.

It was near the dawn.

The door was softly opened, and a stealthy step advanced towards the middle of the room.

It was the prince.

His steps were uneven and his dress disordered. He was, in fact, intoxicated.

He stumbled over a chair, and the noise awakened Alice.

With a smothered cry of alarm she started up, but the next moment she comprehended the scene, and with ineffable disgust turned from the "first gentleman in Europe."

"Ah! my beauty (hiccup) are you there? (hiccup). I thought—"

He said no more. Overcome with the effort he staggered towards the bed, but ere he reached it, he fell forward with a heavy crash, and lay still and motionless on the carpet.

Alice gazed with loathing on him who once caused her

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heart to beat with pride and loyalty, and she determined to fly from the place at once.

Seizing a cloak that lay near her, she enveloped her person in it, and, as the daylight burst forth, she quietly slipped out of the mansion, unobserved; and, speeding along the road, she soon left the scene of trial and temptation far behind.

Then, at the same hour, and, in similar circumstances, Alice and Maud were abroad.

CHAPTER XLV.

HERBERT MANDEVILLE DEMANDS THE RELEASE OF FLORENCE AT THE HOUSE ON THE BLACKWATER—SIR MILES DENIES THAT SHE IS THERE—THREATS—THE SEARCH—THE DISAPPOINTMENT—THREATS.

The sun was slowly sinking in the west, the sky was arrayed in all the gorgeous colours of the rainbow, and the soft summer breeze wafted the gentle murmur of the waves to Florence's ear, as, enraptured by the beauty of the scene, she sat by the open window, gazing pensively beyond.

Sir Miles Cressingham had, as he believed, made a favourable impression on Florence at the dinner; and, pleased and gratified at his supposed success, willingly and courteously acceded to her request to retire to her room.

"She is mine," he muttered, "come what will; but if I can win her without force, I will. So, pretty one, thou shalt be safe to-night, at least."

A relentless and determined smile wreathed his lips as he watched her leave the dining-room.

Poor Florence vainly imagined that he was repenting his cruel conduct, and would yet release her from her present thraldom.

"Though imprisoned here," she sighed, "he cannot prevent my thoughts from joining thee, dear Herbert."

Her eyes filled with tears, as remembrance of the cruel wrong that had separated her from him she loved above all the world crossed her mind.

"Ah! what will he suffer on my account? Oh! merciful Heaven, why has such misfortune pursued us since my poor father's death?"

Again her tears fell fast and thick down her pale cheeks.

"He is far away now, on the bosom of yonder sea; and I here. "Alas, alas! shall we ever meet again.

A distant knocking now fell upon her ear. She listened. It was at the hall door of the mansion.

After a while it ceased, and voices in angry altercation came to her ear.

Ah, little did she know that friends were so near, little did she imagine that her beloved was at that moment in the house.

Yes, so he was.

Herbert Mandeville accompanied by two constables, and Tim Hawkins and half-a-dozen soldiers, had silently and unobserved approached the house of Sir Miles.

After a careful reconnoitre of the premises, they could discover no evidence of her they sought. Of course the side on which the room occupied by Florence was situated was unapproachable from the land being high above the rocks that girded the shore.

With an undefined feeling of dread, Herbert knocked at the huge and ancient door, bidding his followers to stand out of sight till he summoned them forward.

The door was opened by Maynard, who stared with surprise on beholding the young officer, for visitors were indeed rare at that old house.

"Is Sir Miles Cressingham within?"

"No, that is—at least—I believe so—I will see," stammered the old man, who for once was taken off his guard.

"Nay stop, I know he is here."

"But—"

"I will seek him myself."

"You," cried the old man aghast.

"Yes."

And Herbert Mandeville strode into the hall.

In the meantime, Sir Miles Cressingham, alarmed by the knocking had approached the head of the staircase, at the same moment as Maynard opened the door.

In an instant he recognized the voice.

A scowl of deadly hate darkened his features. Then recollecting the probable cause of Captain Mandeville's visit, he hastily retreated to the library, and as he expected found Mr. Atkins nodding before the fire.

"Atkins, man, fool, arouse thee quick," hissed Sir Miles, shaking him roughly by the shoulders.

"Hey! what's the matter now, Sir Miles?"

"The matter; why the devil incarnate—that accursed Mandeville is here."

"The devil he is, then—"

"Haste to the haunted chamber and hide the lady, you know the spring, do you not, in that passage behind the picture."

"Perdition, she'll know the means by which I could have entered her chamber—but—then—there's no help for it."

"And—"

"Curse your ands, go and drag her from the room, if she will not move, away with you!"

Atkins hastily quitted the room grumbling audibly at his master's rough language.

Florence was sitting by the window, but in an attitude of listening, when Atkins entered the room.

She started up on beholding the man enter with his stealthy cat-like step. There was something in his course and sensual features, something in the cold glance of his eye, that caused a shudder to pass over her frame, for which she could not account. That his visit boded no good she felt well convinced in her own mind.

"Good evening lady," he said, rubbing his hand as if they were cold.

Florence looked inquiringly at him, but made no reply.

"Sir Miles has commissioned me to conduct you from here, fair lady."

"Oh, heaven be praised, am I then free at last," then noticing the mocking smile in those stoney eyes—she checked herself—and the horrible fear came over her, that something hellish was in store for her.

"Nay, I will not leave this room with you. Where is my maid?"

"Ah, but my pretty one you must leave this room. You see there's some visitors arrived who maybe will want to search the rooms—and my master has no mind that his pet-bird should be discovered. So come along quietly.

So saying, he walked towards the picture we have alluded to before, and pressed his finger on the ring that encircled the lady's finger. Instantly a sharp click was heard, and the next moment the picture receded from view, revealing a large aperture in the wainscot.

Florence uttered a cry of fear, and her dream, together with the horrible story connected with the picture, filled her with so much terror that she could scarcely stand.

"Now my lady."

"I will not go in there."

"You must."

"Oh horrible, am I to be murdered—help—help—murder," she shrieked.

"Stop that squalling," brutally cried the man, "or you will ruin us all."

But Florence needed him not, she rushed to the door of the room, vainly hoping to escape from the room and fly to those who were ready to succour her.

Footsteps were now heard approaching.

Atkins turned pale, delay was fraught with danger to him and to his master.

Grasping Florence by the arm, he forcibly dragged her towards the aperture in the wainscot, in vain she struggled in his strong grasp, she was too feeble.

Another moment and they were in the gloomy darkness beyond.

Florence heard the handle of the door of the room she

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was leaving turned. She essayed to scream once more for help, but Atkins anticipating her, thrust his hand over her mouth. The picture resumed its place, and all was darkness.

With a deep sigh Florence sank into insensibility.

"By heavens, a nice little burden this, I'm half a mind to taste this nice fruit myself. Why should Sir Miles have all the sweet, and I only the growls and curses."

Groping his way some distance further, he stopped at a recess, and touching a spring in the wall he entered a small apartment, faintly illuminated by the light of departing day through a small window near the roof.

It was meanly furnished, being evidently intended as a meeting place only. Laying Florence on a couch that stood on one side, he turned to retrace his step, not forgetting to close the door behind him.

The moment Sir Miles had despatched Atkins on his errand, he quitted the library, and seizing his sword he went to meet his hated rival.

"I will stay him, the dog to brave me thus, in mine own house."

And rushing down stairs he encountered Herbert in the hall just preparing to ascend.

"Aye, Captain Mandeville, what means this intrusion?"

"Ask thyself that question, Sir Miles Cressingham."

"Myself."

"Aye thyself, it surely can be no secret to the robber and kidnapper of women that the law still exists."

"Curse the law," furiously yelled Sir Miles. "How dare you enter my house and with armed men too."

"I come to search this house for the person of Florence Amery, whom you have conveyed against her will to this house, and whom you still hold in captivity against all law and justice."

"Search my house—you come to search my house—you shall answer for this!"

"Nay, I cross swords no more with one whose name is so tainted and polluted."

"Shall we advance, captain," said Tim Hawkins, "and seize the murthering poisoning villain?"

"A look, black as thunder, flashed from Sir Miles Cressingham's eyes.

Captain Mandeville waved his hand to enjoin silence, and then continued:

"I have a warrant to search your house; and search it I will. Constable, do your duty."

"Sir Miles, almost choking with rage, could scarce refrain from running Herbert there and then through the body; but he dared not.

Then, believing that Florence was securely concealed, he suddenly changed his tone, and apparently swallowed the affront.

"Well, Captain Mandeville, I care not to resist the law. You can search. Though why you should accuse me of that of which I am innocent, I cannot conceive. You have certainly used very unjustifiable means towards a gentleman; and in his own house, too. But, then, I can understand the feelings of an expectant husband, and can excuse your insult. Pray enter."

And Sir Miles, bowing courteously, waved his hand towards the stairs.

Without more words, Herbert Mandeville conducted the search through every room in the house; but it is needless to say that Florence was not discovered.

"Well," said Sir Miles, with a fiendish and sardonic grin, as the party returned to the hall, sad and silent—"are you satisfied?"

"No, Sir Miles, I am not," boldly and defiantly said Captain Mandeville.

"Indeed!"

"Aye, indeed."

"Then search again."

"Search again," bitterly reiterated Herbert. "Aye, I will search, and, mark me, watch—there is some devilry at the bottom of this, and woe betide you if I find you out."

"What, dare you threat, upstart puppy, begone, quit my house, ere I kick you forth."

"Yes, I dare threaten, and—"

"Away with you. Constables you have acted on your warrant, now rid me of this boy ere I horsewhip him. You have no further pretence to stay now methinks."

Slowly Herbert descended the step leading into the courtyard, then turning round and facing the enraged baronet, he raised his clenched hand menacingly towards him.

"Sir Miles Cressingham, nought but blood can wash out the hate that is between us, but mark me, thy coward paltry life shall ebb away beneath the hangman's touch. Murderer, that is the doom in store for thee."

"Liar and puppy, not till thy blood flow for ever from thy heart," cried the enraged baronet, who blinded by fury rushed sword in hand headlong on to Herbert.

Quick as lighting, Herbert parried the vengeful thrust, and with a powerful turn of the wrist whirled Sir Miles's rapier from his grasp.

With the flat of his sword, Herbert gave Sir Miles a smart blow on the shoulder, who speechless with rage stood cursing and blaspheming at the fortune that left him defenceless before his bitterest foe.

"Beware," cried Herbert, as he disappeared in the darkness beyond.

Yes it was night, the sun had disappeared, the gorgeous coloured sky was no more, and black and gloomy light alone reigned supreme. Nature lay peaceful and in repose. Not so with man's heart, there the blackness of night be tokened the turmoil of evil and consuming passion. It is night, and Sir Miles soul is blacker still.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FLORENCE ESCAPES.—SIR MILES CRESSINGHAM'S RAGE.—THE PURSUIT.

FLORENCE lay in the little secret chamber but a few moments, in fact, she recovered her faculties almost as the door closed on the retreating Atkins.

Her first impulse was to murmur her thanks to the Father of all mercies, on finding that she was again alone and free from the actual presence of her persecutors.

It was now quite dark, and Florence in spite of her brave heart felt appalled at the situation she was in, and the connection of all she was concerned in, with the fearful scene of the story of the picture.

The horrible burden borne by the two assasins through the passage, as witnessed by her in that terrible dream, was ever before her eyes. It seemed gradually freezing her blood and numbing her very faculties.

With a strong effort, she aroused herself and sought in action to drive away the gloomy thoughts that oppressed her.

Stretching forth her hands she stepped warily towards the centre of the room. Presently she encountered a table and to her great joy a lamp with materials for lighting stood upon it.

They were evidently placed there for the use of those who were accustomed to wonder through these secret passages.

Oh how thankful was Florence when after a brief interval she had succeeded in obtaining a light.

With its aid she now scanned her apartment.

It was a small chamber with rough stone walls seeming like the rock over which the house of Sir Miles's was built, beside the table and the couch on which she had recently been sitting, were two or three chairs, a cabinet, and a few drinking cups, empty bottles and platters.

Soon satisfied with this scrutiny, Florence turned towards the door.

"Who knows," she murmured, "but what I may find the way out of the subterranean passage if I can but open the door."

Remembering that doors belonging to these mysterious kind of places generally opened by some ingenious piece of mechanism, she dilligently sought, by the aid of the lamp, to discover the hidden fastening.

For awhile all her efforts were fruitless, and she was

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about to yield herself up to despair, when suddenly she espied what at first sight appeared to be a peg in the wall, about a yard from the door; it instantly occurred to her that there was not much use for such an article there, so advancing towards it she pressed it, but it moved not. With a look of disappointment she was about to turn away, but again fortune favoured her—this time she pulled it outwards, when lo! it yielded—it moved—and the next moment the door flew open.

With an exclamation of delight she darted through, still retaining the lamp.

After proceeding some distance she paused to recover her breath and take note of her whereabouts.

The passage along which she had wandered was an incline, descending rapidly from the entrance at the house on the Blackwater, consequently if it tended inland it would soon bring her to the required level of the woods beyond the house.

The passage was sufficiently lofty to permit the easy progress of a tall man, and wide enough for two or three abreast. Florence noticed that though it appeared hewn out of the solid rock, there was no appearance of dampness.

Again she proceeded on her way, carefully looking out for turnings or other passages, but none had yet appeared.

At last she came to the end of the passage she had been traversing, and then it branched out in two distinct and different directions,

Florence gazed into the blackness beyond in each alternately, undecided which to take.

However, knowing that there was no time for parleying she took the one on her left hand; but she had not proceeded far when the roar of the sea smote on her ear, increasing in volume with every step she took.

With no other reason than a vague idea—a sort of instinct, if we might so term it, that all was not right, Florence shrank from any further advance in that direction and hastily retraced her steps, and then proceeded up the other passage.

Her progress was now slow and wearisome, for she had become fatigued with the distance she had traversed, and the passage now lay through a stratum of clay and gravel and the footway was consequently uneven and broken.

She had progressed some distance thus when a turn of the passage brought a distant glimmer of light to her view.

"At last I am saved!" she murmured. "That must be the outlet to the woods."

Placing her lamp upon the ground as being no longer of service to her, she steadily followed the glimmering light beyond, which increasing in size as she advanced, confirmed her in her belief.

But, with a cry of surprise, she halted; for the distant light that had served as a beacon of hope and salvation to her had disappeared, and all was dark.

Then her quick ears detected the sound of footsteps and voices.

Was she discovered? was the first agonised thought that caused her heart to stand still.

Trembling, yet silent, she stood, awaiting the approach of those she heard.

Perhaps they may overlook her in the dark.

Onward they came.

But Florence, whose eyes had been accustomed to the darkness, noticed that one was a woman. It was enough for her. She would throw herself on her knees for protection, and go forth to meet them. Surely her own sex would not, could not, be so cruel as the relentless Sir Miles Cressingham.

Florence, acting on this resolve, accordingly resumed her progress in the vault, till she came so near the advancing party that had at first alarmed her, that they stopped in suspense, and maybe fear.

Rushing forward, Florence threw herself at their feet, crying:

"Save me—save me—I implore thee!"

"Who are you, and what danger is near you?" said the woman, who was no other than Flash Carry and her companion, Michael the gipsey.

"Oh! I am persecuted by Sir Miles Cressingham. He has torn me in the dead of night from my home, murdered my servant, and brought me here, and kept me prisoner until this moment that I have effected my escape. You will not betray me to him—will you?" she pleadingly added.

"No, lady, no," said Carry, with emotion. "I have suffered the terrors of imprisonment too recently to feel other than sympathy and sorrow for thy misfortunes."

"Who, and what are you? and why do I meet you in this mysterious and fearful place?" said Florence.

"Alas, it seems strange that two prisoners should escape at one time, though from different tyrants, but mine is a sad story, lady, and one that will make you blush to be in such companionship."

"Ah, no; if you have been unfortunate, so have I. We are sisters now, and sisters henceforth we will be," said Florence, kindly. "You shall tell me your story when we are out of danger here. Come, my sister, let us leave this horrid place."

"Sister! oh, how kind and generous you are," cried Carry, whose nature had undergone a strange change since her forcible abduction from London by Hamet. All the untamed fierceness of her character had yielded to the subdued yet powerful influence of sorrow. The separation from Snowdrop, the terror and fear of Hamet, all conspired to restore her to calm reflection, and to fill her with a determination to quit for ever the kind of life she had hitherto indulged in.

Without a word she turned back, and suffering Florence to link her arm in hers, followed by Michael, she led the way out of the passage.

As the dazzling light of day broke on Florence's vision, she emerged into the chasm caused by the fallen stag, and there to her horror she beheld the dead body of the Lascar, the fiend that had blighted for a time the existence of poor Carry.

With the aid of the withes he had made for raising the dead stag, Michael assisted both the ladies up, and striding through the forest, led the way to his little encampment.

After some refreshment and rest, the two girls, Carry and Florence retired to a secluded part of the forest, where in mutual confidence they related the story of their lives,

"There," said Carry, hiding her face in her hands, "are you not shocked and ashamed to be near one who is so wicked as I have been?"

"No, dear Carry. You are not bad at heart, I know. Misfortune made you what you was. Henceforth fortune shall keep you what you are."

Carry burst into tears, and flinging her arms round Florence's neck, sobbed—

"Dear, kind lady, you have indeed saved me. I will never be unworthy of such a friend—never!"

We will now return to Sir Miles Cressingham.

For several minutes he stood upon the threshold of his home, gazing into the darkness that hid Herbert Mandeville from his view.

Fierce and suffocating was the malice and passion that burned within him.

"I will have a deadly revenge for this. Yes, this very night will I trample upon his betrothed wife. She shall fall—she shall be mine. No more dallying. This very night I will tear from her all that she prizes so. Tomorrow, defiled and debased, she shall return to him. Ha! ha! ha!"

Slowly he entered the house, and proceeding to his chamber he rearranged his disordered dress, then drinking a glass of brandy, he proceeded to the chamber in which Florence had been confined.

Calling Atkins to his side he said—

"Is she in the little stone chamber?"

"She is Sir Miles."

"Good."

"Shall I light you thither?"

"No, give me the light, I will go alone."

"Shall I stay here."

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"Yes, await my return, I may require you."

Touching the spring the picture receded, and Sir Miles entered the secret passage.

Passion had so inflamed his mind that he went with full intention of accomplishing all his evil designs, even if it led to murder.

He soon reached the little room where Florence had been left, and after listening awhile, he softly opened the door and stole in.

All was profoundly quiet.

Shading the lamp with his hand he crept up to the couch to gloat his eyes with the sight of the beauteous Florence.

But who could pourtray his astonishment, his dismay, and his rage, when lo, the couch was unoccupied. He glared round the room. He was the sole occupant.

With a yell of fury he rushed back to the room where he had left Atkins, and seizing him by the collar shouted—

"Fool, dolt, idiot, where is she?"

"Who?"

"Who, why Florence, thou ape."

"Why in the little room."

"Liar," screamed Sir Miles.

"Stop, stop, you'll choke me."

"Where is she?" cried Sir Miles, unheeding the blackening face of Atkins, and giving him another violent shake.

"I—I don't know."

"Curse you!" roared Sir Miles, "are all the fiends in hell against me. But they shall not baulk me."

Dashing the unfortunate Atkins on the floor, Sir Miles bounded through the aperture in the wainscot in pursuit of Florence.

Atkins slowly recovered his footing and rubbing his limbs, he shook his head, saying—

"I'll have no more of this, I'll see who's master now," and was about to leave the room when Lady Bess suddenly entered, followed by the Spider.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SPIDER AND LADY BESS.—MR. ATKINS.—TREACHERY RETRIBUTION.

"Why what's the matter now, Mr. Atkins."

"Matter, oh the devil's the matter."

"Oh, and, why, lor, look there, if there aint a hole in that wall."

"Crikey, so there is," said the Spider.

"Where's the lady? Sure you have't been and murdered her like her that was in that story you told me of."

And Lady Bess looked alarmed and angry.

"No, no, confound the lady, she has escaped, and Sir Miles is in a devil of a rage."

"Well, I'm glad she has escaped, and I don't care how soon I get out of this place either, for I'm precious tired of it. And that Sir Miles is a villain, and no mistake.

"Yes, let us leave this place, Bess; it is devishly dull and gloomy," said the Spider, with a tender air.

"Now shut up, Spider. You know what you are to do; so don't forget that."

"All right, my duck - I won't forget."

"Oh! I'm sure I shall never be able to sleep in there to night now my good lady is gone. Oh! dear, the ghosts will frighten me to death.

"Nonsense," said Atkins.

Ah! you may say nonsense; but I think I will sleep in the same room with you. Aye—what do you say to that?"

"Oh! capital."

"While the conversation was going on, the Spider had gradually got behind Mr. Atkins, without that worthy noticing or appearing aware of it.

"Then, you know——'

Suddenly the Spider dealt Atkins a terrible blow on the skull with a hammer he had concealed in his sleeve.

The man fell like a lump of lead.

"There, you have killed him," cried Bess, "and spoilt all the sport."

"No, my beauty," I've only opened his scent-box, and let some of his *sense* out

"Oh! then, there's no harm done. Now quick—before he recovers his senses, or Sir Miles returns."

Seizing him by the legs, Bess assisted the Spider to drag him into her own little room.

Hastily pulling aside the tapestry that hid the walls, they beheld a recess, about a foot deep, in the wall.

"Aye, that will just fit," said the Spider, with a grin. Then he left the room, and, after a short interval, he returned, carrying a small crow-bar, and a bag containing cement.

First binding the insensible Atkins with cords in case he should recover his senses before they were ready, and make his escape, they proceeded to force out the stones in the recess till they had deepened it as high as a man's stature, then, mixing the cement, the Spider stood prepared.

Raising the helpless body, they bore it to the recess and fixed it in a standing posture.

The Spider then commenced replacing the stones, carefully cementing them together, until they reached as high as the man's breast.

"Stop, Spider," cried the female fiend, "let us bring him too before we go any further, so that he may enjoy his position a bit."

"Well I'm blowed, Bess, you are a rum 'um."

"Am I? Well I've cause to be one, through that black hearted villian there. Oh! what revenge it will be when he sees me and knows what his fate will be."

"Cut it Bess, you make me shiver—you do."

"Well, I know I'm a brute if any one rides me, so you look out, Spider, how you act towards me."

At this moment Mr. Atkins opened his eyes.

"Hush!" said Bess, "he's coming to."

Bewildered with the blow he had received, Atkins, at first, could not comprehend his situation. Then, gradually, as his faculties resumed their sway, he attempted to raise his hands, but of course ineffectually, as they were too securely bound,

"What is this?—where am I?" he exclaimed nervously.

Then raising his eyes he encountered those of Lady Bess looking malignantly and joyously at him.

In the feeble light of the lamp that stood on the table, he thought at first it was the spirit of one he had deemed long since dead.

"Away! away! I did not kill it," he yelled with fear and excitement.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Bess.

"Oh, is it you, young lady?" he said, in a subdued tone, as he discovered his mistake. "I thought that you —you—"

"You thought that I was a ghost, I suppose, didn't you?"

Thoroughly awakened to consciousness, he now noticed for the first time that his arms were bound, and presently his eyes fell on the wall reared in front of him.

"Why, what is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning is that you are to die!"

"Die!"

"Yes, die!"

"Murderess, you dare not."

"Yes, I dare, and what's more, I will."

"Help, help," he shouted, on seeing how determined Lady Bess looked and spoke.

"No, no, my fine fellow, we must stop that bawling or you'll spoil our sport," said the Spider, rushing forward and stuffing something in Atkins' mouth that completely silenced him.

With a groan of anguish he sank back, looking fearfully pale and alarmed.

"Now," said Bess, "listen to me."

The man looked imploringly at her, but in vain, there was no mercy there.

"Years ago there was a young girl in the service of Sir Miles Cressingham. She was pure and innocent, blithe and happy then. In the same house, and in the same service, was a man in form but a fiend in heart. The butler, I think, he was."

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Mr. Atkins groaned.

"That man ruined her. Body and soul he ruined her. She had a child. Oh, my God, how can I recal that terrible time!"

For a moment Bess seemed overcome with the emotion that the remembrances of the past brought out with a sudden and resolute effort, she resumed—

"That girl stands before you; ah, you may well look frightened now. Do you not remember, fiend and devil that you are, you slew the child—my babe—slew it—butcher that you are; and then to save thy cursed self, you charged me with the murder. Oh it was, artfully planned."

For a moment Bess paused.

"Yes, you spurned me, cursed me, drove me to the verge of madness, thrust me into prison, and I endured the doom of guilt. Enough, it is my turn now. You must die; but not to night—oh no.

Atkins's face was painful to look upon, his eyes glared with terror on the fury before him, and now as she just spoke, a gleam of hope flickened in them. She noticed it, and with a bitter and cruel laugh, continued—

"But you will not escape. See, there is a well betwixt us. Now Spider, finish your work.

The Spider then commenced to pile the stone up as before.

It was fearful to mark the agony depicted on Atkins's features, as he saw at once their purpose. Cold drops of perspiration stood like beads upon his brow, and the muscle of his face twitched and strained in the effect to make his cries heard.

At last the wall was finished excepting one stone which was purposely left out, opposite his face. The recess existed no longer, and the wall presented an even front.

"That will do," said Bess, in a deep, yet excited tone, turning to the hole through which his terror-stricken and blanched features could be seen, she added in stern and solemn tones:—"This is my sleeping chamber, and I shall not be afraid of any ghosts for the next night or two, since you will be here to keep me company. Your groans shall lull me to rest; and when every particle of life has left your hated form, I shall quit this place for ever.

With an extraordinary effort Atkins succeded in partially removing the gag from his mouth, and in a smothered, yet agonised voice, he murmured—

"Mercy—mercy—spare my life and I will reward thee with gold."

The Spider's eyes glistened at the bare mention of the word gold, his cupidity was aroused, and he looked inquiringly at Bess, in the hope that she might forego her revenge for the present, and seize the opportunity of earning the old man's gold.

But no, cold relentless was the stare of her cruel eye, irrevocable and unalterable the fixed resolve of her soul.

Approaching so close, that Atkins felt the warm breath of his murderer on his face, she hissed through her clenched teeth—

"Your doom is fixed. You will starve to death, and I shall watch you linger in the torture of the accursed, till I am revenged."

Mercy—mercy—and I will tell thee all—all the dread secret of Sir Miles Cressingham. I will place him in your power, and then all he possesses must and will be yours."

"Ah! can you do so?" said the crafty woman, as the sudden idea crossed her mind, that she might avail herself of all the secrets and villainies he could tell her; but she at the same time resolved that when that was obtained he should receive no mercy.

"Yes, yes, I can, oh pray release me."

"No, no; you might turn the tables upon us if we let you out before you have told us what you promised. And mind you hatch up no lies, or it'll be the worst for you."

"I'll tell the truth, by all my hopes of mercy."

"Enough—begin."

"Sir Miles Cressingham is not the heir to his cousin's wealth. He is——"

At that moment the voice of Sir Miles was heard shouting, as he was returning through the secret passage.

Atkins's eye flashed with hope, and he once more shrieked for help.

With a muttered curse, the Spider dashed his bony fist in the poor wretch's mouth. Then, fixing the gag more effectually, he dropped the tapestry before him; and Lady Bess and the Spider returned to the chamber that Florence Amery had so recently occupied.

Presently Sir Miles dashed headlong into the room, and, with frantic yells and curses, cried out:

"Where is that traitor Atkins—where is he? I will brain him for letting that girl escape."

Then, seeing the Spider standing open mouthed, and with idiotic stare, his fury became uncontrollable.

"Curse you! what are you grinning at, you baboon? Dare you mock me? Take that!" and, rushing forward, he plunged the rapier through the Spider's heart.

The warm blood spurted out over Sir Miles's arm, and splashed in Bess's face; and the Spider sank, with a groan, to the floor, a corpse.

With a fearful scream, Bess darted in horror from the room.

For a moment Sir Miles stood speechless and awe-struck at the effects of his passion. Then, starting up from his reverie, he kicked the lifeless corpse aside, muttering:

"Out of my path, carrion! Thou'lt gibe and mock no more, methinks."

Then, quitting the room in haste, he prepared to pursue the lost Florence.

And Atkins was left alone, the room reeking with murder.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

FLORENCE AND CARRY—THE GIPSIES—THE SUBTERRANEAN PALACE—THE STORM—THE WRECK.

THE morning after Florence's escape she and Carry were seated by an old oak, conversing. After they had exchanged mutual confidence, they began to talk of their plans for the future.

Florence, with a sigh, explained how friendless and poor she was. What to do she did not know. The gipsies had told her that the cottage at Epping Forest was deserted, and that nothing was known of her beloved sister Ellinor. As for the other, she felt they had virtually cast her off. There was no denying that her heart yearned and leaned towards him who should have been her husband and protector. But fate had proved unkind; and, though she did not repine, yet she could not resist the luxury of grieving.

That Herbert Mandeville was far away, across the "waste of waters," she had no doubt; and all her thoughts and hopes were concentrated on the possibility and prudence of seeking him through the wide world, if need be, and join him, never more to part.

Strange inconsistency in the human heart! The pure and unselfish love of woman—so true, so absorbing—sought for, and won, is prized beyond all things. Yet the same priceless jewel, offered unsought, is passed by and often despised.

No wonder then that Florence shrank from what her heart most desired. The fact, by intuitive perception, is patent to every maiden. Yet, she argued to herself, with plausible speciousness, "I am his wife, by every tie that binds the honour of a gentleman." She explained all the difficulties that appeared to surround her to Caroline Andrews, hoping in her heart that she would advise that which she, Florence, was condemning in words.

"Ah, we will go together," said Carry; "that is if you are not ashamed of me."

"Ashamed; oh, no!" and Florence's heart beat with tumultuous joy and hope at the prospect of seeking her beloved Herbert.

"Well, then, we will go aboard, and surely there can be no impropriety while you are accompanied by me, who can pass off as your sister."

"No, certainly not."

"Well, that's settled."

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"But you forget how can I go without money? Alas! alas! I never thought of that."

And Florence looked woe-begone indeed.

Alas, how many a golden dream has been dispelled, and the near consummation of lover's hopes destroyed, by the want of that powerful lever--money.

But Carry soon replaced the bright vision of hope in Florence's heart. She remembered that all the wealth Hamet possessed in the cave, ill-gotten though it was, might without much scruple be seized by her. So calling Michael to her side she bade him go to the place that had but lately been her prison, and bring forth all that was valuable—all that could be converted into gold and silver.

Michael went with alacrity, for he had cause to remember poor Carry with thankfulness; so often had she performed some act of kindness towards himself and his family.

It was a hard day's work for Michael to bring all the valuables from the lascar's cave; and when they were piled on the grass before the tents, the thought occurred to them all that they might have some trouble to get rid of them without exciting suspicion.

Florence gazed with wonder and surprise.

Carry, whose eyes had feasted on them till satiety, looked unconcerned and heedless, notwithstanding the cause she had to remember the pangs of poverty.

It was night; Michael, his wife, mother, and little ones together with Carry and Florence, had partaken of a supper prepared with part of the stag killed by Michael the previous morning.

The night was very dark, and the wind howled mournfully through the branches of the trees around them, whilst the distant roar of the sea, as wave after wave rolled over the breakers, added to the dismal and foreboding sounds.

There was every indication of a storm, and the little encampment felt loath as yet to retire to rest.

Presently a terrific flash of lightning burst over their heads illuminating the country around for miles, followed almost immediately by the crashing thunder. The large drops of rain fell with heavy splashing noise upon the leaves.

Suddenly the wind died away to a murmur, and flash after flash of lightning blazed across the sky, accompanied by the roar of heaven's artillery.

Slower, and with longer intervals between, came the lightning now. The rain descended like a flood, and as the thunder sounded more distant and faint, the air became alive with the rattling of the rain on the trees.

"What a fearful storm," ejaculated Florence.

"Yes, but its fury is spent, I think, now," replied Carry.

"Hark!" said Michael, raising his finger in the attitude of commanding silence.

They all listened breathlessly for a moment or two—Florence especially—for a vague fear that it might be some of Sir Miles's myrmidons in pursuit of her, oppressed her thoughts for a moment.

"There!" exclaimed Michael.

It was the distant boom of a gun.

"It is a ship in distress," said Michael.

"Alas! and can we not help them?"

"No Carry, they are too far off for us to aid them."

"Poor creatures," murmured Florence.

Louder and louder it sounded.

"Why, they must be rushing right on to the rocks of the Blackwater," said Michael.

"Oh if Herbert should be on board," cried Florence, wringing her hands in wild and extravagant grief.

Or, thought Carry, if Tom Starling should be on board, but she said it not, and outwardly she exhibited no sign of the emotion that existed within her.

At last Michael could withhold no longer. All the harshness of his nature was aroused, and he could not remain inactive, a passive witness or listener to the dying struggles of his fellow men without an attempt at least to render all the succour that it was possible.

He dashed forward through the forest in the direction of the rocks that overlooked the sea.

"Let us follow him," said Carry, "if you are not afraid."

"Afraid! oh no," exclaimed Florence.

Together they ran or rather flew after Michael, and in about a quarter of an hour they arrived at the topmost cliff that overlooked the now angry ocean.

The scene was grand and awful in the extreme. Huge and mighty waves rolled over with resistless force breaking like thunder on the shore, while the foaming crests looked like wreaths of snow compared to the blackness of the sky above.

About a mile from the shore, a large vessel could be seen struggling in vain against the wind, which had risen to a gale, and the current that bore her to certain distruction.

There were no life boat stations round the coast of Britan then, and yet the signal of distress was fired. Yet how vainly for this was not even a fishing village.

Regardless of the rain the two girls stood spellbound gazing on the ill-fated vessel that must soon be a wreck.

Michael in the meantime, hurried down the steep and dangerous pathway that led from the rocks to the beach, though in what manner he could be of service he had not the least conception.

At last it came. A fearful crash heard high above the din of the breakers proclaimed the fatal truth. The ship had struck. Then followed the wild and desparing shrieks of the lost and drowning wretches.

Florence closed her eyes with a faint shriek, and would have fallen to the ground had not Carry caught her round the waist.

"Courage, my sister, courage," exclaimed Carry. Then all was still—and the relentless roar of the ocean was the only sound audible.

"Heaven have mercy on their souls," said Florence.

"Amen!" said Carry.

In the meantime Michael had reached the beach just as the ship had struck and sank.

So sudden and so overwhelming was the catastrophe that not even a boat had been launched, and in a few moments Michael was horrified to find the beech strewed with corpses.

He ran to one and then to another in the hopes of finding that life was not quite extinct, but in vain. Bleeding and mangled by reason of the violence with which they were dashed on the jagged rocks, they lay, a sight of horror for the stoutest heart.

Some time had elapsed, and nothing apparently remained on the surface of the water to denote the terrible calamity that had so recently occurred.

Sick at heart, Michael turned slowly from the spot, and was about to ascend the path leading to the summit of the rocks, when casting another look across the turbulent sea, he fancied he saw something floating towards the shore.

"Another victim," he thought, "but however I will wait and see if any life is in it ere I depart."

Returning to the waters' brink, he steadfastly fixed his gaze on the object approaching, when, as it came sufficiently near for him to distinguish, he noted with surprise that it was a large Newfoundland dog bearing the body of a child to the land.

"Brave dog! good dog!" shouted Michael, encouraging the faithful animal in its generous and noble exertions.

With wonderful sagacity and strength the dog struggled with the whirling waters, and succeeded in avoiding the rocks that lay ready to hurl destruction.

He reached the shore, and Michael who had approached as near as the waves would permit, stretched out his hand to assist in landing his precious burden.

As soon as Michael laid hold of the child he bounded up the rocky pathway followed by the dog, whose joyous bark expressed his satisfaction and gratitude.

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ALICE FALLS IN WITH NEW FRIENDS.

In a moment he reached the side of Florence and Carry, and in a few brief and hurried words explained to them what had just occurred.

Affectionately caressing the dog they followed Michel as fast as they could, glad in their hearts with the hope that at least one life was rescued from the disastrous and terrible wreck.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HERBERT MANDEVILLE.—HIS DESPAIR.—TIM HAWKINS.—THE ORDER TO EMBARK.—THE DEPARTURE.

After quitting the house of Sir Miles Cressingham, Herbert Mandeville walked on for some distance in silence. His heart was oppressed with terrible forebodings respecting the fate of Florence. That she was in the power of that arch-villain, Sir Miles, he had no doubt, but whither he had conveyed her, where he had secreted her, passed his comprehension.

"Oh, that I could detect him in his villany," he muttered. "Brief indeed should then be his triumph, my poor, injured Florence." Had the darkness been less intense a tear might have been seen trinkling down his manly cheeks, and he thought it fortunate that it was dark. He, a soldier, deemed it a disgrace, something to bring a blush of shame to his cheek to show the weakness as he thought it of shedding tears.

Yet how many who have passed through life steeped and hardened in the world's guilt, callous to the soft sensibilities that distress and sorrow will awaken in the true heart, would not welcome a tear in the hour of repentance.

Silent and sadly Herbert and his band returned to the village on the Blackwater. Disappointed in their errand, a feeling of gloom seemed to pervade all.

On reaching the inn where Herbert had billeted his little troop, he at once retired to his room. There, in the solitude of his chamber, he could give vent to the anguish that filled and oppressed his heart.

Tim Hawkins, on the contrary, entered the public room, to give vent to his feelings in the interchange of loquacious talk.

It was a quaint little room, with settles around, and a large roaring fire in the grate, though it was now summer.

There were several of the villagers assembled—principally out of curiosity; for the doings of the constabulary

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were then as much watched as those of the government in a large city.

"Well, measter, how did you get on up at the old hou e? Did you find the young critter?"

"No, guv'nor, we didn't," said Tim, seating himself, and calling for a can of ale.

"Eh, how was that? Did Sir Miles kick you out after all—with all them sodgers, too?"

"No, he didn't kick us out," said Tim, with provoking coolness.

"Oh, he didn't?"

"No, he didn't,"

The countryman scratched his head. He was bewildered by the curt way in which Tim Hawkins had answered his curious question.

"Ah," said another, "I thought Sir Miles be too deep for ye. He is a deep 'un, and no mistake."

"So he would not let you in, I suppose?" said another.

"Yes, he did though," said Tim.

The ale Tim had ordered at this moment came in; and, taking a deep hearty draught, he passed it to one of his comrades.

Having quenched his thirst, he felt considerably relieved—mentally and physically—and the ill-nature that till now had predominated gave place to the bursting desire to impart all the information he knew.

"Well, the fact is, the bird is flown, or murdered, perpaps; I don't know which."

"You don't say so?"

"Fact, as sure as I am here."

"What a villain!"

"Ah, that he is. How master—the captain I mean—stood without running him through with his sword, I can't think."

"Did he rage much, then, sergeant?"

The artful countryman made a hit there in calling Tim a sergeant. For a moment gratified vanity assumed the sway, and Tim Hawkins felt an inch or two taller at being addressed as sergeant. He drew himself proudly up, and in the exuberance of his heart offered the ale can to the flattering yokel. But he did not confess that he was only a plain private.

"Rage! I should say he did; why he wore like a maniac he was."

"Was he?"

"Aye, that he was, I never saw the like in all my borne days," said Tim, with an air of importance.

"But you did search."

"Oh yes, we went all over the old house, and a rum place it is too."

"Ah! yes, it be an old house, and many's the deed of blood that's been done in it I'm told."

"Yes, so I've heard. But we could not find a trace of the poor lady we were looking after. No, she was clear gone."

"Ah! that Sir Miles is a deep-dyed villain."

The sound of horses hoofs approaching the ale-house now diverted the curiosity of the gossips from the subject that had till now engrossed them, and as the sounds ceased immediately opposite the inn, they had no doubt of soon being able to satisfy their desire of ascertaining other peoples business.

The door of the parlor flew open and a trooper entered in haste. The dust and travel stains that covered his person and clothes, at once pointed him out as the traveller whose approach had arrested the small talk in the inn parlor.

"Is Captain Mandeville here?" inquired the soldier, in sharp decisive tone. His eye glanced rapidly round the room till it fell on Tim Hawkins, and seeing him in uniform, he at once looked towards him for an answer.

"Yes," answered Tim, "but he's retired to his room, and I don't think he'll like to be disturbed."

"But I must see him now. I have brought a dispatch from London, with orders to spare neither whip nor spur, and deliver them into his hands."

"From London!"

"Yes. Are you his orderly? because if you are, you had better go up and tell him at once."

"All right comrade," said Tim, "I'll tell him."

Tim immediately left the room and ascending the stairs, knocked at Herbert's chamber door.

For some moments Tim waited, but no notice was taken of his summons, that the captain was not asleep he felt certain, because he could hear him pacing the floor of his room, and also see the light shining beneath the door. Tim concluded that his knock had not been heard, and accordingly he knocked again.

This time Captain Mandeville evidently heard the summons, for he strode with long and angry strides to the door and threw it open.

"Oh, Tim, it is you, my lad, what do you want?"

Tim had started back a pace, as his master thus suddenly stood before him, so surprised and struck was he by his altered appearance, so pale, so grief stricken did he look, that Tim forgot for a time the errand that brought him there.

"Why, Mr. Herbert, you are ill, sir?"

"No, no, my boy, I'm quite well, I thank you. Why did you knock for me?"

"A soldier has just come, in galloping haste, from London, and says he must see you directly."

"Bring him up, then Tim, I will see him here."

Tim immediately retired, soliloquising as he went—

"There be something wrong with him, I know. I never saw him look so bad afore. It's all along of that villain that's taken poor Miss Florence away."

He reached the parlour where the travel-stained trooper stood immoveable and rigid, though filled with impatience within.

"This way, comrade," said Tim, who affected the airs of a veteran.

Leading the way to Herbert's room the trooper followed in silence.

On entering, the trooper raised his hand in salute, and placing a letter, of which he had been the bearer, in Herbert's hand, withdrew a step, maintaining a respectful silence. Tim also remained at a signal from his master.

Hastily perusing the note, a frown gathered on Herbert's brow, and with a deep groan he threw it on the table.

"You may retire. Tim, see that the man has the refreshment he needs, and then return to me."

Tim obeyed with alacrity, for he felt certain that something unusual had occurred, and was naturally anxious to ascertain all about it.

"Alas, alas!" murmured Herbert Mandeville, when left alone. "This is most unfortunate. To leave England, perhaps for ever, and that dear girl left unaided to her horrible fate. Oh, how I loathe this uniform—this service—since it tears me from every hope, every chance that might occur by which my dear unfortunate Florence could be rescued."

Tim returned at this juncture, and Herbert addressing him said—

"Tim, you must pack up our boxes as fast as you can, for we must be on the march this very night."

"March to-night?" echoed Tim in surprise.

"Yes, events abroad have assumed a serious aspect, and more troops are required, consequently our furlough is contracted and we must be ready to embark the moment we arrive at London, and our errand here is not accomplished," bitterly said Herbert.

Tim looked unutterable things, but Herbert waved him to proceed to his duties.

An hour after, the little village was astonished and alarmed at the sound of the drum and fife, and fear of French invasion filled many a heart with dread, until it became know that the little troop that had been quartered there were about to march to the wars, accompanied by the recruits obtained in the village.

The recruits themselves, bitterly regretted the foolhardy haste with which they had accepted the king's

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shilling, now that the reality of their situasion presented itself before them. In vain they tried to shirk, in vain sweethearts, mothers, and sisters strove to hide those they loved from the cruel enlisting sergeant. He was not to be done; and when all were assembled in rank and file, Captain Herbert gave the command to march.

The sound of drum and fife died away in the distance, and the little village returned to its wonted quietness, but many an aching heart that had been light and buoyant in the morning had cause to curse that night, and remember with bitterness the advent of the recruiting sergeant.

We pass over the events of the march to London, suffice to say that on arriving at the Tower they found that all was bustle and preparation. The were not suffered to halt for other then refreshment, and were led on board one of the transports at once.

Sadly Captain Mandeville beheld the sails let loose, and as the wind and current bore them swiftly down the river, he folded his ams across his breast, and with downcast looks paced the deck in silence.

Despair was in his heart, and he went forth to battle with an inward determination to scorn, if not seek death in the hottest part of the fight.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ELLINOR AND THE MARQUIS OF BRIDGENORTH.—HIS REPENTANCE. — ELLINOR'S RESOLVE. — THE MARQUIS'S DESPAIR.

THE sight of the beautiful Ellinor, pale and motionless on the floor of the bedroom, filled her maid with consternation, and rushing forth she shrieked again and again.

Comprehending that some danger had befallen his beloved Ellinor, the Marquis of Bridgenorth bounded up stairs to the little chamber, and there with grief and alarm he beheld her prostrate and insensible form.

Raising her tenderly in his arm to bore her to the bed, and ringing the bell violently, he summoned the scared and terrified maiden.

"Quick, girl!" he cried, "water—water—she has swooned, quick I say."

The trembling girl obeyed, and together they sought to restore animation to that stricken form.

At last their efforts were rewarded with success. She slowly opened her eyes, a deep sigh seemed almost to rend her bosom, and a shudder ran through her form.

"Beloved Ellinor," whispered the Marquis, in tones of pathos and tenderness. "What has occurred to drive the bloom from thy cheek, the life blood from thy heart."

The sound of his voice acted like magic.

With a cry like a startled doe, she sprang from his arm that still encircled her, and with averted face and hands stretched out as if to repel his advance, sobbed—

"Leave me, leave me, oh my heart will break, to be so deceived—betrayed."

"Ellinor, my own dear love," cried the Marquis, in agitated tones, "what have I done; why do you repulse me?"

"What have you done," murmured Ellinor, weeping bitterly. "Oh that I should live to call thee villain."

Alarmed and puzzled, the Marquis of Bridgenorth paused a while, and a blush of anger mounted to his forehead. It never occurred to him that she had discovered the fact of his being already married, and believed himself, as most praticians do, to be the very soul of honour, the insinuation that he was a villain came most distastful to his senses.

"In Heaven's name Ellinor, what does this mean?"

"Leave me my lord, leave a wretched girl to the solitude of her grief and anguish, and return to your wife."

The words, my lord and wife, fell on his ears like a clap of thunder. He staggered back as if he had been shot.

"Some one has betrayed me," he muttered to himself.

"Ah!" cried Ellinor, "it is true then—you start—your looks betray your guilt. Oh, Walter, Walter, I did not dream of this."

Again her tears flowed fast.

The Marquis of Bridgnorth felt excessively annoyed, and Ellinor's grief cut him to the soul. Inwardly he cursed the unluckly hour that linked her destiny to one, he not only, could not love, but that he despised and hated. Gay and frivolous though he was, and fond of pleasure, yet he really and trully loved the unhappy Ellinor, and in spite of the difference that existed between them in position and rank, he would have gladly welcomed the chance that could permit him to make Ellinor his lawful wedded wife. Her beauty and amiability had won a place in his heart which was not all bad, and if at times an evil thought predominated, and he resolved to obtain possession of the beautiful Ellinor in spite of right and virtue, he felt that he could execrate himself the next moment for harbouring the thought of so foul a wrong.

But the frequent recurrence of evil thoughts and the constant struggle and warring with them often end in their success, the efforts to controul them become weaker in the oft recurring struggle, and self-conceit will supply sufficient salve to the conscience to satisfy what scruples might remain.

The Marquis of Bridgnorth had reached this point in his moral progress, and had shut his eyes to the furthre reasonings of prudence and virtue, when he arrived at the villa; but the scene which had just taken place had completely overturned his plans.

Now he felt bitterly and keenly how ignoble and base he was. Shame and sorrow sat upon his soul, and he wished to goodness that he had acted more honourably and temperately.

When pure and honest love fills the breast, there can be no keener or more poignant humiliation than the knowledge that we have forfeited some portion of the respect or esteem of those we love.

So felt the marquis. His pride was wounded; his honour sullied.

At last, he seized her hand, and, falling on his knees before her, besought her, in the most moving tones, to forgive him.

"Pardon me—pardon me, beloved Ellinor. Oh! I am not so guilty as I am unfortunate."

"Leave me, my lord," said Ellinor, now more calm, and trying to disengage her hand. "I willingly forgive you; but, oh! pray leave me."

"Oh! do not cast me off then, cruel, cruel Ellinor," cried the marquis, now thoroughly sorrow-stricken at the idea of losing the love that he had won as a poor artist. "Let me find some compassion in thy heart."

"My lord, it is useless to prolong this interview, which is painful to us both. If you did love me——"

"Did love you!" echoed the marquis. Unkind Ellinor, I have never ceased to love you; and never, while life remains, shall I cease to love—to adore you.

"No more!" cried Ellinor, waving her hand to him to leave her. "My dream is over, and my trust in man's faith broken for ever."

"Oh! say not so, Ellinor," said the marquis, in tones of deep feeling. "God knows I have not meditated any wrong towards thee. An evil destiny has linked me with one I cannot even respect. Oh! be merciful, Ellinor. Let me at least hope, when I am free, that you will not cast me off."

"Ah! perhaps, you would not mind accelerating the end of her you detest."

"No—Heaven forbid that my soul should harbour so sinful a thought," exclaimed the marquis, with a fervour that caused Ellinor to turn her tearful gaze upon him.

There was something in his manner, and in the tones of his voice, that made the desponding heart of Ellinor throb with an inward dawn of hope. She thought to herself that he might not be *so bad after all*; and her generous forgiving nature sought for all the extenuating causes in his conduct that eyes dimmed with love could.

The marquis, however, saw not this. All that presented itself to his senses now was the complete isolation from

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him of the only one he ever loved. If he had only been free to wed, nothing would have prevented him flinging his coronet at Ellinor's feet, in spite of the wide gap that existed between them, as regards their worldly position.

But it could not be; and, with imploring looks, the marquis endeavoured to move Ellinor from her resolve to banish him from her presence: but in vain.

Ellinor, in spite of her tender leaning towards the man who had deceived her, and who had won her heart, disguised as a poor artist, felt that her honour was at stake, and that, for the sake of her pure and spotless character, she must, at every hazard and every sacrifice, tear his image from her heart.

Holding out her hand, she said, in a softer tone, yet slightly tremulous:

"My lord, I forgive you the wrong you have done me; but henceforth we must be as strangers. Farewell."

With a burst of grief, the marquis seized the proffered hand, and, covering it with kisses, murmured, in a broken voice:

"My punishment is greater than I can bear. But, oh! Ellinor, to prove to you that I am not all base, I will do as you command me. I leave thee; and, since I must not behold you more, I will be as a wanderer on the earth. I will quit these shores, that will now be hateful to me; and, unless I hear from your dear self that hope shines once more, I never shall return. This house, and all it contains, you may keep, if you will condescend to accept it; and——"

He could say no more; with one passionate kiss of the hand he had still held, he turned and left the room.

Ellinor felt all her woman's tenderness aroused at beholding grief so sincere—so poignant; and she was about to call him back, with the view of saying something to alleviate his anguish; but the words stuck in her throat—it was too late.

Yes, he was gone.

Ellinor sat down, and buried her face in her hands. Long she sat there, pondering over the incidents of the morning.

Yet, in the midst of her grief and cruel disappointment, caused by the discovery that the marquis was already married, she felt the balm of secret joy, engendered by the knowledge that woman's wit or wisdom had aided her in discovering that he really did love her. His word and actions had already told, but now his sorrow and anguish revealed far more to Ellinor's eyes the depth and truth of his affections.

The marquis on quitting Ellinor hastened to London, and immediately sought an interview with the war-minister. His object was to obtain a commission in a regiment ordered abroad, and his wealth and interest soon procured the attainment of his desire.

Without acquainting his friends with his intention, he purchased all he required for his outfit, and at once joined his regiment on board the transport that was momentarily expected to sail.

And by a singular fatality, Herbert Mandeville and the Marquis of Bridgenorth became brother officers, and entered on board the same vessel. Both were unhappy and despairing—both too, by an irresistible destiny from the fond object of their devotion—the one voluntarily, and the other against his strongest inclination, and both resolved to expiate their misfortunes in a death crowned with glory.

CHAPTER XLIX.

RED REUBEN.—MR. GRABALL.—HIS OUTRAGE ON SNOWDROP.—HER RESCUE.

We must now return to the smoky purlieus of London, and midst its bustle and turmoil, its splendour and wretchedness, and its guilt and innocence, endeavour to follow the fortunes of those of our characters who have lain dormant so long.

It is morning, and Red Reuben was busy in cleaning knives for the Rev. Mr. Graball. He was greatly improved in every respects, since he last appeared before the reader, both mentally and physically, for his father had been away so long, and consequently he had experienced such an immunity from corporeal punishment together with kinder treatment and plenty to eat, that he really exhibited the advantage he had derived from such a change in his habits of living.

He was as we just observed cleaning the knives and forks. While so occupied, he endeavoured to lighten the burden of his toil by humming snatches of songs—we say humming, because if he dared to sing—the profanity of such an indulgence would have shocked the pious nerves of the Rev. Mr. Graball.

A gentle knock at the door aroused him, and a smile broke like a sunbeam over his face, as he dropped the knife in his hand and hastened to open it.

It was as he had divined, Snowdrop.

"Good morning Rueben, is Mr. Graball up yet?"

"Oh yes, Snowdrop, do you want to see him?"

"Yes, if you please."

Reuben stood still for an instant as if drinking in with one glance all the beauty before him. Poor fellow, he knew so few who had exhibited any kindness to him in his young days, that he naturally felt as if the very sun of his existence was before him now, and to lose sight of her for one moment only, was like entering into the shadow of a tomb.

Reluctantly then he left her to apprise Mr. Graball of her arrival.

That worthy was supposed to be engaged in his morning devotion, but if he was, they consisted of a large amount of attention to ham, eggs, toast, coffee, &c., which went with flattering unction to his body, whatever else might to his soul.

"Come in," he said, with some asperity, in answer to Renben's tap at his door, for he didn't like to be disturbed. But when Reuben told him who it was that had come thus early to him, his countenance relaxed, and a benevolent smile lighted up his coarse and sensual countenance.

"Show her up directly, sir."

In a few moments Snowdrop entered the presence of the beloved pastor.

"Good morning to you, my sweet child," said Mr. Graball, rising and offering Snowdrop a chair.

"Good morning, sir."

"Is Mrs. Barton well?"

"Oh yes, but she sent me this morning with a message to you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, she prays that if you can possibly spare time from your sacred duties, you will visit her soon this morning, as she is sadly in want of spiritual consolation."

"My dear, wherever my poor aid can save a drowning soul, or administer comfort to the wrestling spirit, there duty calls me."

Snowdrop followed his glances as they rolled towards the ceiling, until she could see nothing but the whites of them, with a silent wonderment, when they descended again and reached the level of her own eyes, they looked so sensual, so sinister, that she involuntarily shrank within herself.

But he did not not notice it, and continued—

"So tell Mrs. Barton,, that I will bring with me peace and blessing in less than hour."

"Very well, sir."

"But stay, will you not take some refreshment before you go?"

"No, I thank you, sir, I have breakfasted."

"But surely you must be tired, and while you rest yourself, you might partake of some slight refreshment."

"No, I am not tired," said Snowdrop, who began to feel uneasy, he looked so peculiarly unpleasant, and moreover, had gradually edged between her and the door.

"Well, if you will go, farewell my daughter."

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"Good bye, sir."

He held out his hand, and placing her own timidly in it, she again bade him farewell, and then sought to leave.

But the demoniac passion of his soul was aroused; the tender loveliness before him completely drove away what little wisdom he had left to cover the palpable grossness of his satyr-like desires, and, forgetting alike his calling and his danger if his true character should become exposed, he pulled her towards him, and imprinted a dozen loving fevered kisses on her lips.

Terrified beyond measure, she knew not for the moment what to do. At last, exerting all her strength, she struggled to free herself from his loathsome embrace. But he was too strong. He held her as if in a vice. She attempted to scream, but his kisses smothered the tones ere they left her lips.

Still she struggled; but gradually she became exhausted. She felt ready to faint, and, with a despairing cry, she sank back on the sofa, towards which he had borne her. Like a beast of prey, fastening its talons on its victim, did this monster appear, as, helpless and senseless, the innocent child lay entirely at his mercy.

Almost senseless in the blind whirl of passion that fired his veins, he heard not the door open. Neither did he see the shadow that crossed the room.

He stayed not to gloat over his victim, but prepared to fulfil the foul purposes of his will.

When crash came a heavy blow on the back of his head; and the Rev. Mr. Graball lay senseless, stunned, on the floor of his own parlour.

Snowdrop was saved.

It appears that Reuben felt quite unhappy at losing Snowdrop again, and thought there could be no great harm in having a peep at her through the keyhole of the parlour door. No sooner was that thought conceived than it was acted upon; and, to his surprise and indignation, he beheld the scene just narrated.

For a time he stood spell-bound. Never did he imagine it to be possible for a minister of the gospel to be capable of committing crime; and he rubbed his eyes, and peeped again, thinking that perhaps he might be deceived; but when it came to the last, he could stand it no more.

The sacred character of minister disappeared before his eyes, and he saw only a fearful villain, seeking to harm, to injure, his idolised Snowdrop.

Seizing the first thing that came to hand in the shape of a weapon, he softly opened the door, and, with one stride, came near enough to deal the Rev. Mr. Graball the blow that laid him low: a blow that perhaps smashed in the revered skull; for Reuben was strong, and, what was more effective in aiding the blow, enraged.

"Poor little Snowdrop," said Renben, noticing how pale she looked, and endeavouring to restore animation to her.

It was some minutes ere she opened her eyes, and when they fell on the form of Reuben, who was supporting her, she smiled, as if unconscious that ought unpleasant had happened, but suddenly she recollected all, and a look of terror crossed her face.

"Reuben has settled him, Snowdrop," said he with a grin. "Look!"

And he pointed to the prostrate form beside them on the floor.

"Oh take me from this horrible place, Reuben."

"Yes, yes," said Reuben, "we will go."

And Reuben rose and lifted Snowdrop from the sofa, and was about to lead her away, but the inanimate Mr. Graball laid in the way, so Reuben, not over gently gave him a kick, with the view of removing him a little aside to allow Snowdrop to pass.

"Why you have not killed him Reuben, have you?" said Snowdrop, in a frightened tone.

"Oh, I'm sure I don't know, maybe he'll only be like poor Reuben," said he, touching his head significanty. "Naughty man, knock poor Reuben in the dark," and the look of intelligence that recently predominated in him grew misty as his thoughts reverted to the original cause of his own injury.

They said no more but prepared to leave the room.

In the terror and excitement at what had jnst occurred, they forgot to close the outer door, and shortly afterwards the passers-by, noticing the door wide open and no one near, began to collect, remarking upon the unusual circumstance.

At last, curiosity rose to such a pitch, that an entry was contemplated.

Some of the foremost did enter—they found the parlor door ajar—they pushed it open. To their astonishment they beheld Mr. Graball lying on the carpeted floor insensible. They raised him up—blood was oozing from a wound at the back of his head.

"It is murder!"

"No, he still lives,"

They take him to the hospital, and as we finish the chapter, he is still insensible.

CHAPTER L.

SNOWDROP AND REUBEN SEEK A REFUGE.—MR. JENKINS.—THE MYSTERIOUS PAPERS.—THE ALARM.

When Snowdrop and Reuben left the house of the Rev. Mr. Graball, they ran some distance ere they thought of where they should go or what they should do.

"Oh, whither can I go now?" said Snowdrop, "I dare not go back, for Mrs. Barton would not believe me, if I told her what has happened.

Reuben's intelligence had by this time returned to him, he now paused and apparently debated in his own mind what course of action he should pursue.

"She is so unkind too," continued Snowdrop. "Poor, poor Carry, how I wish I knew where to find you."

And Snowdrop's tears fell fast, as she remembered the only one who had ever befriended her and her mother.

"Don't cry, Snowdrop," said Reuben, "it makes Reuben sorry."

"Well, well, I won't, there now," she exclaimed, wiping her eyes and smiling. "Where shall we go, for you can't go back to Mr. Graball's you know."

"No," said Reuben, dolefully. "I can't earn any more money there."

"Well, 'spose we go to my mother, she's a good kind mother to poor Reuben, only," added Reuben, in a whisper, "don't tell father where she lives, because she's hiding from him, and if he should find her out, he will beat her—beat poor mother."

Reuben looked thoughtful, a strange inward look beamed in his eyes. The mention of beating brought a host of memories linked with the incidents of childhood, but not happy ones; oh no, he, poor neglected and ill-used lad, could recall nothing but severe flagellations, harsh and brutal words, and starvation in sight of plenty.

"Oh yes, let us go to her."

"Very well."

"And you need not fear that I will ever betray your mother's hidding place."

"No, I knew yon wouldn't," said Reuben cheerfully.

They proceeded hastily in the direction of London Bridge, which after a smart walk they presently reach. It was a bright beautiful morning, and the bustle and excitement of buffetting through the crowded streets, greatly tendered to distract their thoughts from present difficulties. Snowdrop gazed on the forest of masts that lay in the pool, and then on the sparkling water as it swiftly eddied through the arches of old London Bridge. The scene brought vividly before her memory, the fatal ride that cost her mother her life. And Tom Starling, what was he doing now, and when he came back, what would he think of her ingratitude in quitting

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the shelterthat he had so generously placed her in, was the question she asked herself.

Resuming their progress, they soon reached a quiet poor kind of street, in the neighbourhood of St. Thomas's Hospital.

Singling out one of the houses, Reuben walked boldly up and knocked at the door.

A stout elderly matron opened it, and, in answer to his inquiry, gave two heavy raps on the door, and retired, with a look half indignant, as much as to say, "You ought to know that two knocks are the right summons for lodgers."

Footsteps descended the stairs, about half way.

"It's only me mother," said Reuben, who had recognised his stepmother from the doorway.

"Come up stairs," replied a weak and trembling voice.

Leading Snowdrop by the hand, Reuben entered, closing the door after him; and, passing up the stairs, introduced her to his mother.

The room was small, yet clean and tidy, and furnished in a manner to lead a beholder to imagine each article was fixed to the floor.

Mrs. Jenkins was but little changed in appearance since we last introduced her to the reader. If anything she looked more comfortable; yet there was a furtive look ever present in her eyes now, as if she dreaded the arrival of some one that was distasteful to her.

Yes, bold and defiant though she had felt against her husband, much as she loathed and despised him, and in spite of her determination to live with him no more, a feeling of apprehension was constantly preying on her peace. She felt confident that should he discover her, he would ruthlessly take her life.

The moment she understood that Reuben and Snowdrop came there as runaways, seeking rufuge and protection, she welcomed them kindly and sympathisingly.

Then preparing some refreshment, she invited Snowdrop to partake of it with them.

Mrs Jenkins knew all about Snowdrop from Reuben, and consequently felt doubly interested in her from the knowledge she had that the little box of papers she had abstracted from the vault where Red Reuben had secreted them, concerned her.

She was still ignorant of their contents, and only guessed at their value from the eagerness manifiested by some to obtain possession of them; but now that Snowdrop was to be to her as a daughter, all the plans she had formed with regard to the disposal of them, gave place to an unselfish wish to do whatever lay in her power towards reparing the wrong that evidently had been perpetrated against Snowdrop and her mother.

The repast was finished. Reuben strolled out to see how things looked, but really to give the females an opportunity to understand each other, which, he thought, with wonderful tact for so weak an intellect, could be best accomplished without the presence of a third party.

"My dear," said Mrs. Jenkins, "I want to speak to you about yourself."

"Indeed."

"Yes. Did not your poor murdered mother have some papers which she set great store by?"

"Yes; I have heard her say something about papers, but I never saw any, though I believe she said that they were in safe keep."

"And did you know what they were about?"

"No, indeed. I did not."

"Well, you can read now, my dear, can't you."

"Only a little, ma'am."

"Well, those papers I have got."

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"And did mother give them to you then."

"No, she gave them to Reuben to mind."

"To Reuben?"

"Yes."

"And what are they about?"

"That's what I'm coming too.'

Snowdrop looked, curious and eager.

"But though Reuben had them, he lost them."

"Lost them," echoed Snowdrop, with a look of disappointment and sorrow.

"Yes, they were stolen."

"Alas!"

"By me."

"By you?"

"Yes, you must know, that Reuben hid them in a hole in the wall of the cellar where his brute of a father used to put him after he had beaten him, and at last it came to my turn to be put in the cellar, and there I accidentally found them where Reuben had put them. I did not know then what anxiety there was among some to obtain them, but when I did I secured them, thinking that by their means I could secure myself from future want, and at the same time have my revenge on him who had so often beaten and then imprisoned me."

She paused a moment to recover breath, but resuming her narrative, she continued—

"He went into the country on some villanous errand I have no doubt, and while he was gone, I took the liberty of bidding good-bye to him and his den for ever I hope. My first intention was to take the papers to Caroline Andrews, as she was the only one that I knew who could read, but I found that she had disappeared and no one knew how or whither.

"Ah, poor Carry," said Snowdrop. "She did indeed love me, but I shall see her no more."

"I thing that wretch—her lover—must have murdered her, the same who robbed your poor mother of her life,'

"Oh, I trust not."

"Well, to my story. I have the papers here, and if you can read them, why, we shall know what they are, and perhaps find out who you are."

"I can but try," murmured Snowdrop, whose heart beat fast, at the probability of being able perhaps to pierce the clouds that had obscured her origin so long.

Mrs. Jenkin's rose from her seat, and going to the further part of the room, she opened a drawer in a bureau, and returning to Snowdrop, placed on the table before her the curiously fashioned casket or box that contained the papers.

Reverently and silently Snowdrop lifted the lid and drew from it a document carefully tied round with a piece of ribbon.

She untied it and opened the paper, and was about to commence reading it, when a loud knocking was heard at the street door.

"Good God! it must be my husband," said Mrs. Jenkins, in a tone of terror.

Snowdrop sat still, her face paling with an indescribable fear.

"Conscience makes cowards of us all," says the poet, and the consciousness of doing, or having done something that somebody will call us to account for, does indeed make brave hearts tremble,

The street door was opened—gruff voices were heard—followed immediately afterwards by the heavy tread of men ascending the stairs.

CHAPTER LI.

ALICE AMERY'S FLIGHT.—HER DISTRESS.—NEW FRIENDS.—HER ILLNESS.

When Alice left the villa at Wimbledon, whither the noble Prince Regent had conveyed her, she sped rapidly along the road leading as she believed towards London.

Her fear lest her escape should be discovered and she pursued, lent wings to her feet. Oh, how degraded she felt, as in that sweet morning air she ran forward. The whole world seemed mocking at her woe and wretchedness.

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The air was alive with the merry notes of the little songsters of the trees; and the wild flowers in the hedgerows glistened in their jewelled dress of dew drops, as the early sun smiled lovingly upon them. Yet there was no charm in it for Alice.

She hated—she despised herself. She had listened to the honied voice of the Prince in the vain hope that it might awake a feeling of jealousy in Sir Miles Crossingham's heart. But, oh! how grievously was she disappointed. Instead of jealousy he had exhibited, if anything, a feeling of pleasure, as if he gloated over the prospect, or rather gulf, that was opening before her. Surely, she thought, he did love me once; and can man's heart be so truly base as to seek to bring evil on one he had once loved? No, it could not be. And yet his actions showed that he was seeking to do her injury. If so, then he never could have loved her. As this burning thought crossed her soul, she almost shrieked, in her agony of mind.

"I'll tear him from my heart!" she exclaimed, fury beaming in her eyes: I feel now that I hate him. Oh! my sisters, had I listened to thy advice; had I not yielded to this accursed pride, I had not now been like this—a wanderer, a fugitive, in a strange and unknown country.

Overcome by her feelings, she sat down on a bank by the road-side, and partially swooned away.

How long she remained there she had no recollection, but she was aroused from her stupor by hearing several voices speaking close to her.

Painfully and languidly opening her eyes, she found herself surrounded by a group consisting of a lady and two gentlemen.

The hedge beneath which Alice had seated herself, happened to be the boundary of the grounds that surrounded the mansion of the elder gentleman who stood before her. Whilst walking in the garden they had been attracted towards the spot where she lay by hearing her moans. The other gentleman was a much younger man than the former, apparently his son. He was very handsome; effeminately so, and but for his dress might have been taken for the sister instead of brother of the sweet and compassionating face that looked into Alice's eyes.

Tenderly raising her up, the young man was about to lead her towards the house, when exhausted by the turmoil of her feelings and the exhaustion she had undergone, Alice gave a faint sigh, and her head fell unconscious upon his breast, his sister at the same time seizing her hand. The old man looked quite alarmed.

"Poor thing, poor thing," he exclaimed; "why she will die; all exposed too, nothing on her. Where did she come from, I wonder?"

The young lady here stooped down and picked up the mantle that Alice had worn from the villa at Wimbledon, and which in her swoon had fallen off her shoulders.

"She is very beautiful," murmured the young lady. "I wonder who she is?"

"I think, sister, it would be more charitable for us to render her some assistance instead of wondering who she is."

"Aye, true boy, ejaculated the old man. "Let us carry her in doors at once."

But the young man needed no assistance. Strong and athletic, though so delicate in features, he bore the insensible Alice easily in his arms to the house, followed by his sister and father.

There he resigned her to his sister's care, who had her conveyed to her own chamber.

It was long ere Alice became conscious of aught around her; and when she did, she was ill and exhausted that a medical man was at once sent for, who instantly ordered her to be kept still and quiet; but in spite of these precautions, the night found Alice worse. A dangerous fever had fixed its fangs on her, and delirium intervening, her new friends could not glean any intelligence as to her friends, who they were or where they resided.

Her ravings gave them no clue, for singular to say, she never uttered the names of those who had been so intimately connected with her in thought and deed.

The people into whose hands Alice had fallen were the family of Lord Hampden, known as being strongly in favour of the young Pretender's claim; and, though all hope for the Stuarts had long since vanished, yet the old Earl of Hampden clung to his conviction still, and never had, nor ever would, attend the court of the Hanoverian monarch.

It was owing in a great measure to this that Alice Amery was not recognised, as she would otherwise have been, as her connection with her late friend, the baroness, had rendered her person sufficiently familiar with the frequenters of the Regent's court.

Days passed, and still Alice was dangerously ill. The strange and unaccountable manner in which she had been found had not a little aroused the curiosity of Lucy Hampden and her brother Gerard. The latter especially was much struck with her beauty, which, in the langour and exhaustion that oppressed her at the time of her discovery, appeared more than usually interesting; for Alice's features were faultless. It was only when in the full exercise of her faculties she exhibited the vanity or hauteur of her character that drove away those who admired softness of expression.

Lucy Hampden was assiduous in her attention. Naturally noble and generous, she felt nought but sympathy and affection for the poor friendless girl who had thus fallen into their hands; while her brother, by some uncountable impulse, felt attracted towards her from the first moment when his arm encircled her waist, and her head rested on his bosom.

Gerard Hampden had never loved, that is, he had never experienced that tender and bewitching feeling that permeates the hearts of those who are thrown into the society of some one of the opposited sex, whose appearance excites strange and new emotions in his breast. His seclusion aided in this result, and now that a beautiful woman —a stranger—was thrown in his way, he discovered himself thinking of her, taking bearing as it were of her points, and dwelling on every little incident that could present her to his mind.

At last Alice was pronounced out of danger, and soon afterwards she was permitted to descend to the drawing room.

It was a lovely morning in summer, when she entered the reception room, the lofty window revealed an extensive and beautiful view of the country beyond, now shining beneath the glory of the life-giving sun. Standing thoughtfully by one of the windows, was Gerard Hampden, gazing apparantly on the view before him, but in reality absorbed in his own reflections to the exclusion of all outward scenes.

Alice leaned on the arm of Lucy as she entered, but started back in some confusion on seeing the noble form of Gerard beyond.

"It is only my brother," whispered Lucy.

"Oh, let us go back."

"Nonsense, what for?"

Alice looked distressed, she knew not why, an half defined feeling filling her breast, that she a disgraced, a degraded thing, and she shrank from any contact with people of the world.

The friendly scuffle that took place at the entrance, at last aroused Gerard's attention, and started from his reverie and gazed around. A look of surprise immediately succeeded by one of pleasure, showed how deep the impression of Alice's beauty was in his heart.

He instantly advanced towards Alice, and seizing her hand, pressed it to his lips, saying—

"Dear lady, how glad I am to see you thus far recovered from your illness."

"I thank you for your kind sympathy," murmured Alice, "but oh, how can I thank you, and your generous care of me, when helpless and a stranger."

"Do not mention that, it is but human to succour a fellow-creature in distress."

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"Of course it is," said Lucy, "that's what I told her, but you see Gerard she is so very sensitive."

More conversation to the same purport took place until Lucy recollected that she had forgotten something or other, and Alice and Gerard were left by themselves in the drawing room.

"What is your name?" said Gerard, smiling. "It is rather impertinent on my part to catechise you thus, but I am curious to know what fortune threw you hither, and—"

"My name is Alice Amery."

"Alice Amery?"

"Yes."

"I think I have heard the name, but I am not certain. Alice Amery," he repeated to himself, "Alice, 'tis a pretty name."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I don't.

"Don't you?"

"No. And your name—what might that be?"

"Mine is Gerard,"

"What a strange name!"

"Yes, it is rather."

Time flew on, and Alice and Gerard were unconscious of its progress. In each other's secrets they forgot the whole world beside; and Gerard was fain to confess himself that he was deeply and irrevocably in love with the beautiful girl before him.

And Alice—what were her feelings towards her benefactor? Why, she felt that she had not enjoyed the society of one of her opposite sex since the days when she believed that Sir Miles Cressingham loved her.

Could she really be falling into the vortex of love again? Was her heart indeed touched by the torch of Cupid, lighted by Gerard Hampden?

Yes, it was too true. The image of Sir Miles had disappeared for ever from her heart; and in its place reigned that of the handsome and noble Gerard Hampden.

Lucy returned to them, then, after a long lapse of time; and, with a look of pretended surprise, she said:

"What, still here? Oh! how imprudent. You will be exhausted."

"Why, I've not been long here—have I?" said Alice, with a look of incredulity.

"Oh, no; only an hour and a half."

"Nonsense, Lucy," said Gerard, "you are amazing us."

"Am I; well it is by telling the truth then."

And with a sly toss of the head at her brother, Lucy gently led Alice back to her apartment.

"You know, dear, you are not strong enough to be so long out yet; I am sure it was very thoughtless of my brother to detain you so long."

"Oh, he is not to blame, it was my fault."

"Oh, I dare say it was," said Lucy ironically.

A few more days elapsed, and Alice was perfectly recovered. Even mentally she was improved, for the presence of love in her heart served to drive away reflections of things, however unpleasant, and daily she walked out in the garden, or the fields beyond, accompanied by Lucy and Gerard.

One evening, when returning home after one of these wanderings, Lucy strayed off as was often her wont, to gather wild honeysuckles. While she was absent the moment seemed propitious to Gerard.

They were beneath the branches of a lofty chestnut, not a breeze stirred the leaves, the golden sunlight streamed over the landscape, and the tinkle of sheep bells and the lowing of cattle sounded musically upon the air.

Alice's arm was linked in that of Gerard. A rather longer silence than usual had happened. And Alice was about to make some remark relative to the scene and time with the view of removing the embarrassment of a long silence, when Gerard said, with an averted face—

"Alice, did you ever love?"

Here was an awkward question. How could she answer it. If she told the truth, she would sink with shame to acknowledge that she had been scorned and rejected by man.

"I—I don't know," she replied, in some confusion. "Why do you ask?"

"Because, Alice, I have."

"Indeed!" said Alice, with a start of surprise and anguish, for she imagined as he had spoken in a past tense, that her affection had again fallen on one who could not reciprocate them.

"Yes, I love. Ah! that I might hope it was not in vain."

Alice perplexed, remained silent.

"Alice," whispered Gerard, "dare I hope?"

"What?" exclaimed Alice, still more perplexed.

"That you might smile on my suit?"

Drawing the unresisting form closer to his side, he murmured in accents that only love can hear—

"Alice—dearest Alice, I love thee!"

A dreamy mist passed before her eyes; unconscious of all save the bliss of being loved, she did not feel the pressure of his lips against hers. All was like a dream, until the gay, laughing voice of Lucy broke the spell—

"Well, I never!"

"May I hope?" whispered Gerard in Alice's ear, as they reached home and he bade her good night. "May I hope, dear, dear Alice."

"Yes, oh, yes!"

"Heaven bless you."

But Alice had already flown, and in the solitude of her chamber she gave way to the feelings of happiness that now oppressed her.

CHAPTER LII.

LADY BESS—THE CONFLAGATION—ATKINS' DEATH.

When Lady Bess ran from Sir Miles Cressingham's presence she dashed out of the house in spite of the alarm and attempted interference of the old servant.

Into the darkness of night she rushed screaming and yelling until utterly exhausted she sank down in a partial swoon on the outskirts of the village.

There she sat till aroused by the noise of drum and fife. It was Herbert Mandeville and his troop leaving the village.

Hastily arranging her dress, she prepared to hurry on to the village before the soldiers left it—so that summary vengeance might be had against Sir Miles; but she reached there too late. They were gone.

Seeking a refuge at the very inn that Herbert had just left, she determined to pass the night there, and to make her way to London the first thing in the morning.

However, the next day found her exhausted, and far from well; so she determined to stay there till the evening, when she would make for the next village.

Accordingly she stayed that day; and, when the evening came, that fearful storm which we alluded to some little while ago burst in all its fury on the country around.

Of course she could not go then.

It was while watching the storm that her thoughts reverted to the poor wretch Atkins, whom she had left in so terrible a situation at the house on the Blackwater. In spite of her agitation and fear and the horror of the scene in which she beheld the Spider murdered, hateful to her though he was, she felt no remorse, no relenting as regards Atkins.

On the contrary, the deadly hate that had animated her bosom during the fearful progress of entombing alive, seemed to redouble in intensity, for she deemed her revenge but half satisfied since she could not witness his dying agonies.

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ELLINOR AVERY SEEKS ADVICE OF THE MINISTER.

A flash of lightning suddenly burst from the clouds, terrible in its vividness, and ere the loud reverberating thunder had died away in the distance, she became aware that something unusual was happening at the house on the Blackwater, from which she had just escaped.

Its position, situated on the summit of the rocks beyond the village, rendered it a conspicious object all round the country.

What first attracted Bess's notice, was an unusual light in some of the windows at one time. Could she be mistaken.

No—it was fire.

The glare increased; the windows of an entire wing presented the same appearance.

It was struck by the lightning. That old house, so steeped in crime, so saturated in blood, was at last doomed.

Already, in fancy Bess heard the voice of Sir Miles raving and swearing.

"Fire! fire!" was the cry that resounded through the village, as the inhabitants discovered the conflagration.

And now the flames burst forth from the mansion, and the villagers rushed off to render what assistance they could.

Bess sat spell-bound, gazing upon the awful scene. Then, unable to resist the impulse that impelled her to join in the throng that hurried thither, she went.

Grand and terrific was the scene; the entire building was one mass of flame, Unchecked, it went on devouring all before it. Resistless and exulting, the flames licked around the walls communicating with every part of the building.

Bess gazed on the wing where she knew Atkins had been placed, and watched with intense and painful interest, at lost the entire front of the house bulged outward.

There was a cry—a rush. The people shrank back in alarm and terror, and with a crash the front walls fell, revealing the interior of the rooms in the back.

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The sight was now extraordinary. The flames leaped and danced round the furniture in fantastic shapes, sparing nothing.

Lady Bess singled out in an instant the painted chamber: and there the flames were just in the act of consuming the tapestry of the wall behind which Atkins was placed.

It was too distant for any ordinary sight to discover; but Lady Bess at that moment seemed gifted with magnificent sight. The horror of the death that awaited her betrayer almost caused a feeling of remorse to enter her soul. She strove to turn her gaze from the scene; but in vain. She could see, as clearly as if she stood within the room, the agonised and scorched face of her victim.

Horribly distorted he looked; for the burning of the tapestry had seized the hair of his head.

Writhing and struggling to free himself, he looked despairing and appealing towards Bess, as it seemed to her distorted imagination.

The stone in the wall became red-hot.

He was being baked.

The rope that bound him now fell from him, rotten and burnt.

He raised his fleshless arms; he tore at the stone wall in front of him.

In vain. His doom was sealed.

Bess saw it all. It was like a vision. She saw the glaring agony of his eyes, that would haunt her till her dying day.

He now seemed to become—like all around him—red-hot. He looked like a shape of fire. He became transparent. Bess could see through him.

He was perfec ly still now.

As Bess still gazed, fascinated, on the view, he gradually seemed to become merged in the surrounding flame, and she saw him no more.

Her revenge was complete.

A sickening feeling now came over her. Her gaze seemed fascinated on the spot. She strove to turn from the scene; but in vain. She appeared rooted to the spot.

At last nature could sustain no more. With a wild shriek, she fell insensible to the ground.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE MERCHANT SHIP—TOM STARLING—THE CHASE THE FIGHT—THE CAPTURE.

It was at the period when Buonaparte, in the prosecution of his ambitious desires, had ravaged Europe with fire and sword. He had swept away old dynasties, and substituted dragoons and guardsmen; and at last stood almost like the Alexander he emulated, without more worlds to conquer. But not quite. The obstinate islanders—the nation of shopkeepers—still existed unconquered. The wonderful navy of Britain was invulnerable.

A tight little merchant vessel was struggling gallantly through the rough waters of the English Channel. It was morning, and a dense fog that had hung pall-like all the previous day was just lifting its veil, and the eager and anxious crew were endeavouring to discover the fleet of merchantmen with whom they were being conveyed.

As the fog floated away, a light breeze sprang up, and the men, in obedience to orders, went aloft, and shook out a reef or two of canvass.

They now scanned the ocean, but not a vestige of the missing convoy could they discover.

"Here's a pretty mess we're in now, skipper," said a rough manly voice, who was no other than our old friend Tom Starling. "The mounseers will be sure to nab us now."

"Yes, it is rather awkward," said the captain, thoughtfully.

"What direction had we better steer?"

"Oh, keep her before the wind; perhaps we may come up to our friends yet."

'Aye, aye, sir."

Stepping aft, he gave the necessary order to the man at the wheel. Returning to the captain, he said:

"What are our bearings, captain, do you think?"

"Well, I was just going to my cabin to overhaul the chart. All seems snug and taut at present. So come below, Tom, and we'll see what sort of a chance we've got."

Descending to the little cabin, Tom and the captain commenced to find out what part of the world they might be steering for.

After passing some minutes over the chart, they both looked at each other, in a peculiar manner.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Tom.

"It's all up, I think, with our cargo and liberty."

"Yes, unless some devilish good luck comes to our aid."

"No chance of that," said the captain, with a half grieved, yet half comical, air.

Tom looked at the chart again.

"Yes, it's France, sure enough," said Tom.

"And the wind blowing to leeward."

"If it was night now——"

"Aye, but it's morning."

"Yes, and only three leagues from the land."

At that moment they heard the shout of the look-out man—"Land ho!"

The captain and Tom looked at each other again.

"What's to be done?" said the captain,

Tom scratched his head, but did not answer.

Again the look-out man shouted. This time it was, "Ship ahoy!"

Tom and the captain sprang up the hatchway.

There was no mistaking how matters stood now. Stretching far away on their larboard-bow was the low coast line of Normandy. The wind was blowing then swiftly towards the hostile shore; and some half-dozen knots astern was a large corvette, displaying the colours of France.

"Helm hard—starboard!" roared the captain.

"Aye, aye, sir," sang out the man at the wheel.

"Unreef the top-gallant."

The order was rapidly obeyed, and the ship struggled forward under more canvass, tacking against the wind.

"She has good legs," said the captain to Tom; "and, if we can only round that point, we might yet give them parly-vous the slip."

The corvette could now be seen in chase. Though the little merchant ship had not hoisted any colours, yet the way in which she suddenly tacked was enough to excite the corvette's suspicion.

So the next moment a gun was fired at the "Susan" (the name of the English craft), to bring her to.

But the captain took no heed.

Another was fired, and the shot fell far a-head in the water.

"Ah, that will never do," said the captain and Tom together.

"We had better hoist the French colours," said the captain.

"Yes, it might give us chance."

"Run up the French rag," shouted the captain.

In another minute the French ensign floated at the peak.

There was a bustle perceivable on board the corvette: and presently they signalled to the "Susan" to bring to, by means of flags.

"I s'pose there's no hope for it—the lubbers!" said the captain. "Their long shots will send us to Davy Jones in less than a twinkling, without us even so much as taking one of them with us."

"Curse 'em!" said Tom, "I should like to have had a cut at their ugly jibs."

The captain reluctantly gave the order to take in sail, then calling the men round him, he said—

"My men, our cruise is over sooner than I expected I fear. Yonder lubber is bearing down upon us, and

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though I know you have all stout arms and hearts, yet we stand no chance with them, the odds is too great. But if you think I'm doing wrong, and you would sooner die than go to a French prison, only say so, and I'll stick to you to the last."

The men looked gloomy and savage. To be so soon captured after leaving Old England was too bad; but as the captain concluded, a look of gratification appeared in each rough and weather-beaten face.

"Aye, aye, captain, let us fight it out. They'll only pill us in another way if we are taken to prison," exclaimed they all with one voice.

A smile of pleasure lit up the captain's face, for he was like an old war horse, and sniffed the battle afar. It was only on the score of humanity and prudence that he dictated the first part of the speech.

The odds were indeed fearful; in fact, no way except stratagem existed for their extrication out of the present difficulty.

"Bravely said, messmates," cried Tom, "we'll thrash them yet."

A loud cheer burst from the men spontaneously, and presently the captain ordered arms to be distributed to each man. They only mustered sixteen hands including the captain, while their ship carried but two brass six-pounders, so that in a fair fight they had not the shadow of a chance.

During these proceedings the corvette had launched a galley, which was pulling rapidiy towards the unfortunate "Susan." They were about half way between the two ships. The corvette lay-to as well as the English vessel, deeming the boat's crew she had sent quite sufficient to tackle the merchantman if it should turn out that they were enemies.

Breathlessly and anxiously the crew of the "Susan." watched the approaching boat. They had loaded the two carronades to the muzzle with grape and pointed them towards the coming enemy.

The captain had explained his plan of operations to the men, and all stood resolute and prepared, each armed with a cutlass and pistols, while on the deck lay a score of muskets loaded, and ready at their hand.

"Silence fore and aft," cried the captain in a low, deep tone, as the corvette's boat came within hail.

"D'on venez-vous?" shouted the officer in change of the boat.

"What does he say?" whispered Tom to the captain.

"May I be tarred and feathered if I know, Tom, it is a lingo I never could understand."

"D'on venez-vous?" again shouted the Frenchman.

"Now men, be steady," whispered the captain. "Are you all prepared?"

"Aye, aye, sir," was the muttered response.

"What is it you're saying?" shouted Tom, in answer to the French officer's inquiry.

The moment Tom's voice was heard, a terrible scene of confusion ensued among the crew of the French boat.

"Anglias! Anglias!" they shouted.

"Blow me, if I can understand them," said Tom. "Lord, how they do jabber."

For a while they laid on their oars, the crew in the meantime hastily resuming their arms, which they had flung aside, not believing that they would require them. but the hated sound of an English voice had aroused all their hate, and clamouring to be led at once to the ship of the base Anglais, they vowed all manner of vengeance.

Once more then the boat approached the "Susan," and a stern silence reigned both in the boat and on board the ship.

"Now Tom," said the captain, "you point that carronade, and I will point the other, and we'll give them a reception they won't expect."

"All right, sir."

The boat was now some half dozen pulls from the ship. It was crowded with men. all eager to board the vessel and prove the superiority of the Gallic cock over the British lion, or leopard, as Bounaparte would call it.

"Now Tom."

"Aye, aye, sir."

There was a flash, a bang, and then a shower of grape fell among the astonished Frenchmen.

With screams and yells they redoubled their exertions to reach the ship.

"Quick Tom!" cried the captain.

Simultaneously the two carronades again explode and hurl their contents into the midst of their enemies.

Each discharge had done sad havoc among them, their crowded state materially assisting the English in ridding them of their enemies.

Still they were vastly superior in number, and they now came so close that it was useless to waste any more shots upon them.

"Loosen sail!" shouted the captain of the "Susan."

Every sail that had been but recently furled was loosened in a moment. The wind filled, and the ship leaped forward, leaving their pursuers some distance astern again.

A volley of oaths, succeeded by a volley of musketry, directed at the reefers, followed this manoeuvre of the "Susan."

A loud cheer burst from true English hearts as they witnessed the discomfiture of the Frenchmen, and the English ensign was displayed with saucy pride.

"Hurrah!' cried Tom, "that puzzled them a bit I'm thinking."

The corvette, at the first report of the firing, had taken the alarm, and quickly comprehended how matters stood. Without loss of time they again stood in chase, refraining from firing until they had picked up their own boat, which nothing daunted still pulled resolutely towards the flying "Susan."

An hour had elapsed, and the English ship was now nearing the headland they had hoped to round before, thinking that beyond they might have clear sea room to show a swift pair of heels.

The pursuing boat was a good distance behind, while the corvette had commenced to make a sweep round, so as to catch her on the starboard tack.

"Oh, for a dark night," said Tom.

"Or another fog," said the captain.

They now reach the point, they round it, they clear it; the corvette and the galley are hidden from the view. A cheer was about to burst from their lips as they view the glorious expanse of ocean before them, when suddenly they espy another ship a little ahead on their weather bow.

A glance was sufficient to tell them that they were running foul of another Frenchman, this time a frigate.

"It's of no use a going agin luck," muttered one of the sailors. "This comes of sailing on a Friday."

"Nonsense, Bill," said another. "It was all along of the fog that got us in this mess, and not sailing on a Friday."

"Ah, that's what you say, but I knows better."

The corvette now appeared again, together with the galley, and the frigate seeing the British ensign floating over the "Susan," had tacked also to capture the prize.

There was no hope now.

Hemmed in on all sides, nothing remained for them but to surrender.

Still the crew of the "Susan" refused to yield. though for the sake of humanity the skipper urged them to do so.

"We must have one slap at them, captain," they answered.

The galley was the first to arrive alongside, but ere they could board the "Susan" her crew seized their muskets and gave them a broadside full in their faces.

With a yell of rage the Frenchmen swarm up the vessel's side. In vain the English sailors dash their cutlasses at them, dealing death at every blow. They are too numerous. The captain is already wounded, together with six or seven of the crew. Still they struggle and yield inch by inch before the overwhelming number opposed to them. The deck is covered with blood, all are more or less wounded, yet still they fight.

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Tom Starling is like a lion among them; every blow of his arm brings down a foe, but unaided what can he do? He stands alone. All his mates are beaten to the deck overpowered by numbers. For a time he keeps the entire rabble at bay, but at last a blow from a marlinspike dealt behind him, levels him with the deck, and the "Susan" becomes the prize of the Frenchman.

When the corvette came alongside, her captain was for hanging all the crew that survived, so enraged was he at the great loss he had sustained in men, which was the more galling when he discovered how insignificant was the force against which they had been opposed.

But the captain of the frigate (which arrived almost simultaneously with the corvette) was a mam of noble and generous feelings. He admired and respected all that partook of the character of nobility of heart.

The gallant and glorious defence of a mere handful of men against a host filled him with admiration, and he would not permit any other treatment than that belonging to prisoners of war to be used towards them. As commander of a frigate of course he was superior officer to the captain of the corvette, and the latter had no alternative but to obey, though with an ill grace.

Thus Tom Starling became a prisoner of war, and in exile and captivity it is impossible to say how long he would remain.

CHAPTER LIV.

ELLINOR AVERY ARRIVES IN LONDON.—HER ANXIOUS INQUIRES FOR FLORENCE.—MEETING WITH MAUD.

When the Marquis of Bridgnorth left Ellinor in the manner we have detailed in a previous chapter, she sank overcome and powerless in a chair.

She sent her maid away, for she earnestly desired to be alone.

The feelings that now overwhelmed her heart were too much for her, and in the solitude of the chamber the gave vent to a flood of tears.

She was truly unhappy—wretched. But a little while ago and she revelled in the imaginary bliss of love—honourable and reciprocated love. Now, oh! bitter thought, she felt that she had been the dupe of treachery and design. And yet, in the utmost recesses of her heart a still small voice would whisper, "oh, he does love me; he will not betray me."

And, to tell the truth, his behaviour at the conclusion of their interview—his despair, and generous and chivalrous resolve, caused Ellinor's heart to beat with hope and renewed love.

But still her soul and high sense of honour revolted at the idea of loving a man who already possessed a wife, and she mentally resolved, if it should break her heart in the effort, to forget that she had ever seen the poor artist—alias the Marquis of Bridgnorth.

After this determination she became more reconciled to her fate, and drying her eyes, she descended to the parlour. Her maid was overjoyed to find her so much better than she expected, and hastened to offer her good offices and congratulations:

"Oh, Miss Ellinor, I am so glad you are better," said Jane. "I was afraid that you was taken very seriously ill, indeed."

"No, it was nothing," answered Ellinor, evasively.

"Shall we walk in the garden?" said Jane, "it is so pleasant, and I think it will do you good."

"Yes, we will go into the garden: the fresh air and the scent of the flowers will, I think, do me good," said Ellinor faintly.

Accordingly they sally forth to enjoy the beauties of the little garden attached to the house, which was a gem in its way.

After spending some time in admiring and criticising the floral specimens that ornamented the garden, Ellinor said with a sigh—

"Jane, we must leave this place. I cannot live here after what has occurred."

"Indeed," exclaimed the maid, with a look of wonderment; "then where shall we go?"

"Alas, I scarcely know. The cotttge at Epping I dare not return to, for the remembrance of what occurred there would kill me."

"Oh, yes," cried Jane, shuddering and covering her face with her hands; "that would be terrible."

"Oh, my poor Florence, what can have become of her?" sighed Ellinor.

Here her feelings became too much for utterance, and she looked the very picture of despair.

"Ah, my dear young mistress, do not give way to grief thus. Who knows, perhaps Miss Florence may have met with Mr, Herbert and got married after all."

"Impossible! Did I not see her torn from the house by monsters in human shape? Oh, God! her cries for help ring in my ears now."

Jane looked with shuddering sympathy at her young mistress; for she could not forget the past she had witnessed, in that awful scene that cost her poor old servingman his life.

"Jane, I cannot rest till I find out what has become of my darling sister. I will sell the cottage at Epping; and, with the annuity left me, I shall be able to search the wide world without being reduced to want or beggary. Will you remain with me—or is it too much to ask of your generosity—and accompany me in my wanderings in search of my lost sister?"

"Oh, no, miss. I will never leave you, unless you desire it. I will follow you to the end of the world, if you wish."

"Heaven bless you. Jane. I knew you would not desert me," murmured Ellinor.

Accordingly Ellinor entered into explanation with her maid, as ragards her intentions and plans.

That she could not accept the Marquis of Bridgnorth's offer to live in the house, and call it her own, as long as she liked, was not to be wondered at, consideriug the invidious position it would leave her in. So, hastily packing up the few things that constituted her wardrobe, she prepared to leave for ever the place that had become distasteful to her, as being the scene of her cruel and bitter disappointment.

In a few hours Ellinor and Jane arrived in London.

At first she did not know where to drive to. Her dislike to the Baroness Fitzwalter made her shirnk from seeking her at present, though she had no doubt that the rest of her sisters were there. But Ellinor's pure and artless notions shrunk from the thoughtless and dissipating life that was passed amid courts, and knowing that her presence would not offer much delight to those sisters, she decided to seek a quiet lodging a little apart from the busy turmoil of the metropolis, and there endeavour to add to her little income by the exercise of the talent and ingenuity she knew she possessed.

Accordingly she proceeded towards the extreme west of London, a locality then partaking partly of the rural, for a few cottages were the only habitations scattered about the now well-known suburb of Brompton.

Here she soon discovered an apartment to let that had every appearance of being likely to suiting her. So closing at once with the landlady she took possession at once.

"And now Jane," said Ellinor, when the two were seated in the newly acquired apartment, "I fear that I must part with you. My circumstances will not, cannot allow of the extravagance of keeping a servant. It grieves me to lose you, for you are more to me as a sister than a domestic. Yet still it must be."

"Oh, do not send me away, my dear young mistress. Let me at least dwell with you, I shall never ask wages of you. And besides, you ar too delicate, too weak to do anything for yourself. It will kill you," said Jane, evidently much distressed at the possibility of parting from her mistress, for whom she possessed a deep affection.

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"Alas, Jane, I cannot allow myself to be so selfish as to sacrifice your prospects in life by entombing you here. No, no, it must not be."

"Oh, do not say so."

"Yes, my lot is henceforth among those who toil for their bread. I certainly am not like some, who are entirely dependent upon their hard earnings, because I have the small annuity left me by my godmother; but alas, I know not how soon it may fall to my lot to have to provide for my poor giddy sisters, who I know will never be able to help themselves."

And Ellinor wept as she thought of the different circumstances in which herself and sisters were placed since the unfortunate death of their father.

"Well if you won't let me stop, I will act on my own resolve." and Jane looked really determined. "I will not leave you."

"Oh," said Ellinor, with a pleased and reproachful look. "You really must not stay."

"Yes, Miss Ellinor, I will."

"Well," said Ellinor, with a little sigh, "if you will stop, I suppose you must,

"Yes, I mean to."

"Dear kind hearted girl, you are a friend indeed that adversity does not change."

And so Jane remained as the friend and companion of Ellinor, but really she worked hard,in fact, harder than if she had been as she used to be a salaried servant.

As soon as Ellinor became settled in her new home, she began to arrange with Jane as to the manner in which they should pursue their enquiries after Florence Avery.

Ever since that terrible night of abduction and murder, Ellinor's thoughts recurred to her darling and favourite sister with poignant and acute anguish. And the mystery and uncertainty that existed as to who were her abductors and whither they had taken her, made Ellinor almost beside herself.

Her first act then was to seek Herbert Mandeville, and ascertain if he was cognisant of all that had taken place. Perhaps, she thought, he has not only heard of it, but has probably rescued and avenged her.

"Oh, if he has," she murmured, clasping her hands together, "what a relief to my bursting heart it will be."

But it was not so.

As Ellinor feared and in spite her desire to the contrary, she discovered that Captain Herbert Mandeville had left England for the war the day before.

Here was a bitter disappointment. To whom else could she apply. In her heart she believed that Sir Miles Cressingham was at the bottom of the whole villany, and believing thus how could she seek or consult him as to the lost Florence.

It was at this stage that Ellinor, bewildered and uncertain how to act, decided that she would apply to the minister of the parish, and reveal to him her whole history, and ask him for advice as to how she should act.

Accordingly she sallied out alone, leaving Jane at home to prepare their frugal evening meal,

She soon reached the quaint old church, near which, she had no doubt she should find the habitation of the good man who ministered to the spiritual wants of the district; and she was not far wrong, for next the enclosure that surrounded the sacred edifice, she observed a small dwelling-house with a brass plate on the door, bearing the pretentious title of "Rectory" on it. She immediately approached the doorway, and after a moments hesitation, timidly knocked.

The door opened, and in answer to her inquiry if the rector was at home, she was informed that he had gone out to take his usual exercise in the fields yonder, and that if she went in that direction, she would, without doubt, encounter him, as it was near his usual time to return.

Ellinor, without a moment's hesitation thanked her informant, and proceeded in the direction indicated. She crossed two or three fields, and as the scene became more and more rural, she began to fear she might lose her way.

Pausing, half irresolute whether to proceed or return, she looked around, and all at once she espied the object of her search.

She felt assured that he she sought was now approaching. His dress and manner proclaimed him the man of God. He had evidently reached the period usually ascribed to middle life. His countenance was full and benignant, and the top of his head being bald gave him the appearance of a good-humoured fatherly person. His dress was in the clerical costume, so that Ellinor could not have made any mistake.

Walking straight up to him, she said—

"Excuse me, dear sir, but are you not the rector of this parish?"

He looked up surprised, evidently thinking that the party who asked this question could not be in the habit of forming one of his congregation.

"Yes, young lady, I am."

"Thank God then, I have found you," she ejaculated.

"What is it you require of me?"

"I have sought you, sir, that I might confide in you—ask your advice, in fact. I am friendless in this wide and busy world, and I know not whom to turn to."

"You are welcome to whatever good may lie in my power to effect for you."

"I knew you would not avoid me. You will be to me as a father. You will tell me how I can pass through this polluted earth untainted, will you not?"

The rector was deeply moved by her earnestness, and gazing awhile on her beautiful face, he said—

"Come hither, daughter, you shall tell me your story here," and leading her by the hand, which he had taken, to a large and shady oak that stood apart in the field, he bade her sit down on the mossy bank, himself setting the example.

From here they had a view over the fields, and a little beyond the old church backed by the distant hills.

Ellinor, after collecting her thoughts awhile, proceeded to relate all the incidents that had happened since her father's death, and with which the reader is already acquainted.

The master listened with marked attention as Ellinor, growing eloquent, poured the tale of her woes and wrongs in his ear.

When she had concluded, he said:

"Your tale is indeed a strange one; and, alas! I grieve to say, only too probable in this age of profligacy and sin.

"And my sister Florence?"

"I am afraid she is lost to you."

"Oh! no—do not say so."

"Well, I do not wish to give you pain; but the character of the man that you say you believe to have torn her from her home and kindred, leaves nought but gloomy apprehensions and fears as to what has happened."

"Oh, my poor Florence!"

"But, my child, do not let despair overcome you. Remember there is One who 'tempers the wind to the shorn lamb;' and his all-protecting arm is ever ready to shield the oppressed and the persecuted."

Ellinor answered only with her sobs.

"It may be," continued the good man, "that some unforseen incident occurred to arrest the doom that threatened her."

"Ah, if it were so!" sobbed Ellinor.

"Well, let us hope."

"Oh my heart misgives me. That wicked man, Sir Miles Cressingham would suffer nothing to stand in the way of his cruel relentless will."

"Well, well, it is late now; we must retire to our homes, and in the meantime, I will see what plans can be adopted for discovering the fate of your unfortunate sister."

They left the shade of the old oak, and proceeded towards the town together. Ellinor more reconciled, listening to the exhortation of the rector.

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As they neared the rectory, he said—

"By-the-bye, I had forgotten that I was about to leave town for a few days or perhaps weeks."

"Leave town," echoed Ellinor.

"Yes, on private business."

"Then I shall lose you ere I have found you."

"Yes, but I was about to observe, that I might be able to ascertain something about your sister in my travels."

"Perhaps you might, but I fear not."

"During my absence, I have engaged a young curate to fill my place, and I have no doubt, you will find much consolation, and gain good sound advice from him. He is about to be married. Rather a romantic affair I believe. But he is very poor, and knowing his worth, I feel constrained to engage him; poor young fellow, he has had some sorrow too I hear.

They now arrived at the rector's residence, and Ellinor on being pressed to enter and partake of some slight refreshment, could not find it in her heart to refuse so kindly an invitation.

It was dusk, and at first Ellinor could not distinguish the objects in the room that she was introduced to, but the rector advanced before her, and with an accent of surprise, said—

"What Mr. Warburton, how do you do? This is an unexpected visit, but you are welcome nevertheless.

A genteel yet spare figure stood before then grasping the rector's hand.

"I have just been talking about you too, Mr. Warburton. This young lady I shall have great pleasure in giving into your especial charge while I am absent."

The young man bowed.

"This," said the rector, turning to Ellinor, "is the gentleman who takes charge of my parish for a time, as I told you as we walked hither."

"And Mr. Warburton, do my eyes deceive me, or is that indeed the lady I shall have the honour to unite in the bands of holy wedlock to yourself."

"Your eyes do not deceive you," said the young curate, with a faint blush, that is—"

"Here are the lights," said a cheerful voice belonging to a buxom homely-looking woman, who entered with the candles. "Here are the lights," and setting them on the table, she arranged the curtain before the window, and then retired.

As the eyes of the party regained their sight, which the sudden influx of light had dazzled, a cry like that of a startled fawn burst from the lips of Ellinor.

"My sister—Maud!"

"Ellinor—dear Ellinor!"

And the two ladies were clasped in each other's arms, in one long and tight embrace.

"Oh, Maud, Maud!—what means all this?"

"I cannot tell thee now. But you, where have you been? And Florence, where is she?"

The utterance of that name awoke all the agonies that had just slumbered in Ellinor's bosom for a moment.

"Oh, Maud, Maud! do not ask me. She is lost—lost."

Sinking on a chair, Ellinor buried her face in her hands, and wept, as if her heart would break.

Poor Maud looked deeply distressed—not being able to comprehend the full meaning of it all.

Gerald Warburton stood silent and aghast—equally puzzled and pained—not liking to interpose between the sacred grief of the sisters.

But the good rector came to the rescue. He explained to Maud all that had happened to Ellinor and Florence, as he heard it from Ellinor's own lips.

Maud stood spell-bound with grief. She was no longer the foolish giddy girl she had been. Love had fallen upon her soul, and touched her passive heart—with its weird-like power, awakening feelings and joys that had hitherto laid dormant, and calling forth the gushing waters of sympathy.

"Maud my beloved, you are ill?" whispered the tender voice of Warburton in her ear.

"Oh, Gerald, Gerald!"

And falling into his arms that opened to receive her she wept upon his bosom.

CHAPTER LV.

SIR MILES CRESSINGHAM AGAIN SEEKS FLORENCE IN THE SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE.—THE SMUGGLERS.—SIR MILES A PRISONER.

Rushing through the house like a madman, Sir Miles Cressingham shouted for his man Andrews. But there was no response to the summons. The other servants fled at his approach, and like a trapped panther he glared around in fury, seeking for some object on which to vent his wrath.

For a brief interval he stood thus. His sword held in his hand in a threatening manner, from which still trickled the blood of the murdered Spider.

Then, as if seized with a fresh impulse, he turned and darted back to the yellow chamber.

Striding over the prostrate body of the Spider, regardless of the bloody and horrible scene around him, he leaped through the secret entrance, again bent on exploring every nook and cranny in strict search of the missing Florence.

He revisited the little stone chamber where he had in the first flush of his power and triumph expected to find her. He examined every corner of it, but not a vestige of anything could he detect that could lead to any information regarding her.

Cursing and blaspheming most horribly he dashed the door aside, and with the lamp held high above his head, emerged again into the gloomy passage.

Nothing, however, met his view. Carefully he scrutinised the ground. lest in her fear she might have swooned, but no object resembling her he sought met his eyes.

In his previous search he had not proceeded so far through the subterranean vaults as he had now, and moreover, his knowledge of their intricate windings was gained more from secret family documents than any personal experience of his own, consequently his progress was slow and uncertain. He knew that there was an outlet to the sea shore, but about the palace that had been inhabited by the lascar, Hamet, he was entirely ignorant.

Therefore, on reaching the end of the passage where it branched off in two directions, he took the one on the left hand—leading to the sea.

Of course he found no clue to her who was the object of his solicitude and search.

As he stumbled onward over the broken rocks, for the ground was strewed with the fragments that time had separated from the roof and sides, the noise of the roaring sea became louder and louder in its echoes, reverberating with deafening vehemence through the cavernous passage.

Sir Miles, nothing daunted, still pushed on, swearing and cursing as he ever and anon fell forward, tripping over the impediments in his pathway.

At last he felt certain by the increasing volume of sound that assailed his ears, and by the moist and saline atmosphere that enveloped him, that he was near the outlet on the shore.

Suddenly his lamp went out, the oil was exhausted, and with a faint flicker the flame disappeared entirely, leaving him in total darkness.

Groping his way as well as he could in the direction of the sound and the air, he pursued his way still cursing and swearing.

He now could discern a dim light like a star in the distance, and with increased ardour he followed it, or rather pursued it, though it was really stationary.

"'Tis she," he hissed rather then said, "I have her at last. The sea stays her further progress. She is mine after all."

With a brutal oath he sprang forward, regardless now of the hurts he received in his headlong rush.

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Nearer and nearer appeared the light.

Without doubt it proceeded from a lamp. Of that Sir Miles Cressingham required no confirmation.

Presently he heard, or thought he heard, human voices. He paused and listened for a moment.

Sir Miles Cressingham, villain as he was, was no coward, and after listening for awhile, he again continued on his way.

"Who will dare stop me, or keep from me my lawful prize?" he exclaimed, as he rushed on.

He could now distinguish voices in loud conversation, mingled with occasional fits of laughter.

Surprised and half bewildered, Sir Miles endeavoured to satisfy himself as to who they could be, located in so secret an abode and so merry withal.

At first, his conscience suggested that the sounds he heard were not human, and a superstitious fear crept over him, as he suddenly thought of the victims to his rage and cruelty now in the keeping of the tomb.

But Sir Miles Cressingham was essentially a sensual man, his fears and his courage alike were swayed to long as they concerned the grosser part of his nature, his corporeal or sensual existence. What cared he for that which existed only in men's minds, a creation of the brain, as he would call it. "I believe in no old woman's tale," was his reply to those who urged the superiority of mental over physical, or spiritual over natural.

The moment therefore that conscience with her still voice whispered to his heart, exciting a vague dread of something he could hardly comprehend, he threw against the scale the whole weight of his physical unbelief, his courage rose, and he rushed on.

Still keeping the light or lamp in view, he went on some distance, when ere he had expected it he suddenly emerged from the passage into a large spacious chamber hewn out of the solid rock, from the centre of the roof of which hung suspended, the lamp that had led him hither.

A glance around revealed to his astonished gaze a group of men in various costumes, about a score in number. As he entered they were seated in a circle on the rough floor smoking and drinking from a barrel that stood in the midst. But the instant he appeared so unexpectedly amongst them, they sprang to their feet as one man.

"Zounds!"

"Treason!"

"Treachery!"

"We are betrayed."

These were the various expressions that fell from the lips of the astonished smugglers (for such they were), as Sir Miles appeared so strangely before them.

Ere he could offer the least resistance, they sprang upon him, and disarmed him. Then, with stout cords, they tied his arms behind him.

"Unhand me, fellow!" cried Sir Miles, struggling in vain to free himself from the indignities now heaped upon him.

"All right, my fine fellow," replied one of the men, with a laugh. Don't kick, because it's no manner of use whatsomever."

"Villains, you shall repent this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you know who I am?" gasped Sir Miles, with an effort to appear calm.

"Oh, yes, we know you very well," said another. "You are the supervisor, ain't you?"

Roars of laughter greeted the speech.

Curse it!—no. I am Sir Miles Cressingham."

"Whew!" whistled one of the men, "here's a fish for our net."

"Well," said another, "since so fine a gentleman has come to pay us a visit, it is but fair that we introduce ourselves to him."

"Hear him!" cried several voices.

"Sir Miles Cressingham, allow me to introduce you to the boldest smugglers that ever crossed the straits," said the former voice, bowing and scraping, in mock humility, before Sir Miles.

"Cease this folly, and let me hence," said Sir Miles. "I care not what you be so as you cross not me and my purpose."

"At any rate you'll drink our health," said another, offering a pannakin of brandy to Sir Miles.

With an execration, Sir Miles dashed the cup from the fellows hands, bound though he was at the elbows.

"Curse your lubberly figure head for that," said the man; "you nasty son of a sea cook."

"Never mind him," said another, "let's be jolly while we've time."

So flinging Sir Miles unceremoniously in a corner of the vault, they prepare to resume their revels that Sir Miles's presence had but recently disturbed.

Bitter indeed were his reflections as he lay half bruised on the ground where they had flung him.

All his hopes and plans marred by this untoward rencontre. The rage of his heart burnt him like lava. To be foiled thus. It was too much for his thoughts to dwell upon.

And then the mockery of these taunting devils, singing and drinking with light and joyous hearts whilst he lay surrounded with the torments of hell.

The night passed on in wild debauchery, until overcome with the potent influence of the fiery liquid, one by one sank insensible upon the spot on which he had hitherto been sitting.

No sound but the deep snoring of the drunken smuggler mingled with the murmur of the sea, smote Sir Miles's ear now.

Could he effect his escape, now was the time.

Vigorously he struggled to free his arms, but alas, it was in vain. Like true sailors, they had secured him by a knot such as they only can tie.

He looked around in the hopes of seeing a light of some kind by which he might burn the rope that bound his arms.

But the lamp suspended from the ceiling was the only thing that emitted light, and that he could not reach.

He then thought that he might quit the cave bound though he was, while his feet remained at liberty.

Painfully, yet with difficulty, he succeeded in regaining his feet.

Should he retrace his steps through the subterranean passage, and seeking aid return and take summary vengeance for the indignities that had been heaped upon him.

But as he stood erect and his recollection recurred to the innocent and remote cause of his present dilemma, a feeling dark and malignant crossed his heart.

"I will not yield her up yet. No, in spite of them I will proceed onwards. Though how she could have escaped from these fellows I am at a loss to conceive.

Creeping stealthily and silently along, he passed the motionless and sleeping bodies on the floor, and proceeded his original direction—the sea.

Not one of the smugglers moved. He saw the outlet on the side opposite to that which had led him hither. He feels the invigorating sea-breeze, and another minute he beholds the wide expanse of ocean through the vault, sparkling with phosphorescent light—a few more steps and he is at the mouth of the cavern.

He is about to emerge into the open air, when to his astonishment and dismay two dusky figures in strange and fantastic garb leap from the shadow beside the entrance, and seizing him by the shoulder prevented his further progress.

At first he thought they must be devils, the dusky hue of their countenances strongly favouring this supposition, but as he felt their sinewy grasp his fury at being again foiled became perfectly ungovernable. With a yell, like a fury he hurled them off as if they had been mere infants, and then turned like a tiger at bay.

"Oh! that my arms were free!"

"Ah! you traitor, me kill you," cried one of the men he had just flung off, who was none other than one of Hamet's lascar slaves.

"Stand off!" shouted Sir Miles, as they rose, and,

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drawing their long knives, prepared to rush on him, and end his career at once.

With a spring, one fastened on him like a cat, and was about to plunge his knife into Sir Miles's heart, when, alarmed by the noise, the drunken smugglers rushed forth to ascertain the cause.

It was at this critical point in Sir Miles Cressingham's life that they appeared.

"Hold, Abdallah!" shouted the foremost smuggler. "Spill no blood."

"He strike me down; me must have his blood," said the excited and revengeful Asiatic.

"Get off, I say," repeated the smuggler, who had first spoken—"get off, you copper-faced villain, or I'll smash all the bones in your little shrivelled body."

The two Lascars shrunk back into their old positions again beside the entrance, looking and breathing unutterable malice and vengeance.

"How now, my fine fellow?" said he who appeared to be the leader of the smugglers, to Sir Miles. "What's your game now, eh? Been trying to slip your cable, and take French leave of us?"

And the man looked good-humouredly, yet provokingly, at him, as he spoke.

But Sir Miles was too enraged—too full—to say or speak much. With a look of hate and scorn, he turned on his heel, and stepped towards the outlet.

But the smugglers now surrounded him again, and he was forced to follow them back to the lofty vault, or cave, where he had first so unexpectedly come upon them. Sullenly and surlily, Sir Miles seated himself on an empty barrel that one of the smugglers had pointed out to him; and, the silence being restored, the lawless crew seated themselves as before, and commenced playing at cards—resuming the drink, as if they had not touched a a drop for a month.

With occasional remarks, interspersed with bursts of laughter, the hours of the night passed by.

Sir Miles sat motionless as a statue, glaring like a madman on the party before him. He could not sleep; fatigue he felt not. All was subject to the all-engrossing mortification that oppressed him.

At last the morning light struggled through the entrance of the cave: the air was cooler, and the inhabitants of the vaults felt chilled, as is usually the case with night watchers, and rising and yawning they threw aside the cards and commenced sundry employments that suggested themselves.

They were evidently expecting some one, and as the morning grew apace they began to feel anxious and impatient.

"What can keep him so long, I wonder?" said the chief smuggler.

"I'm hanged if I can make it out," said another.

With measured steps they paced the limits of the cavern. Still no arrival.

"Shall we seek him, mate?"

"No, no," said the chief; "he would never forgive us if we intruded on his privacy."

"Well, I'm blowed if I like being cooped up here so long. Curse his yellow hide," muttered another in gruff and discontented tones.

"Hush!" sternly commanded the chief.

Still grumbling, the men resumed their walk, exhibiting in downcast looks how much they resented the treatment of him they were waiting for.

It was now near the hour of noon, and still the expected one had not arrived.

Seriously alarmed, the man who had hitherto assumed the functions of chieftain summoned the crew together, and told them plainly that he believed something had gone wrong with their master.

"A good job too, say I," said one, in a dogged and sullen manner. "If he's killed it's no more than he deserves."

"Aye, aye, Bill's right; if the devil's got him now, that's all as it should be, snug and ship-shape," said another sea-dog.

"But that's not to the purpose," said the leader. "Shall we seek him, or sail without him? That's what I want to know.

"Well, if we seek him, where the devil can we look for him?"

"Where?"

"Aye—where?"

"That's true again, and argued like a sea lawyer. In course we don't know the bearings of these underground rat holes. It's bad enough to be here, without having to grope through there like moles," and the speaker pointed to the passage leading inland.

"Sartingly not," exclaimed several voices at once.

"But," said the leader, "his two slaveys yonder might be able to ferrit him out, and I think we'd better not sail till we know the rights of him."

Accordingly, they summoned the two lascars who kept guard at the entrance.

With a cringing yet wily gait they approached the conclave of smugglers, their crafty eyes looking like flaming coals.

"Now, then, old copper skin, move your stump," cried one of the smugglers.

A deadly look of hate was the only reply.

"Abdallah and Abdul! Where's your master?" asked the smuggler chief.

"We know not, Sahib," said Abdallah, with a profound obeisance.

"But you know where to look for him, don't you?"

"Yes, Sahib."

"Then go!"

"Yes, Sahib."

"And dead or alive, bring him here, and that quickly, d'ye hear."

"Yes, Sahib"

With a smile of mockery they glided out of the vault into the passage that Sir Miles had emerged from.

While they were absent, the smugglers amused themselves by speculating on the probable appearance of their master, or employer. It was plainly to be seen that their inclination was tending to his non-appearance.

"Shiver my timbers, if I don't hope they'll find his dead carcase—the old cormorant!" said he who had answered to the name of Bill.

"Aye, so do I."

"Well, we shall know all about him soon, I'm thinking, so let's have a spell of grog, captain, as I suppose we shall have to call you soon."

Not caring to thwart the men in their present mood, the smuggler chief nodded an assent, and the men hastened to help themselves to the liquor they coveted.

Sir Miles Cressingham, his rage having exhausted itself, began now to feel some interest in what was going on. The anxiety and impatience of the men had not escaped him, and their visible discontent encouraged him to hope that it might in some measure lead to his deliverance.

By the time the sun had disappeared below the distant horizon, and the storm which Florence, Carry, and Michael had witnessed, as described in a previous chapter, burst with all its fury.

Awed, in a manner, at the fearful war of the elements, the smugglers gathered in little knots, conversing in low tones, while the dingy vault was occasionally lighted up with the dazzling lightning.

Presently they all started in terror, for a sound greeted their ears that seemed to belong to nothing mortal—so fearful, so unearthly it was!

Again it rang shrill and piercing on their ears, reverberating through the vaults and passages in a thousand echoes.

"What the devil's that?" said Bill, with a scared and startled look.

"I'm blowed if hell isn't let loose on us!" said another equally scared.

As it once more resounded through the passage—this time much nearer—the smuggler chief, who had remained silently listening, exclaimed:

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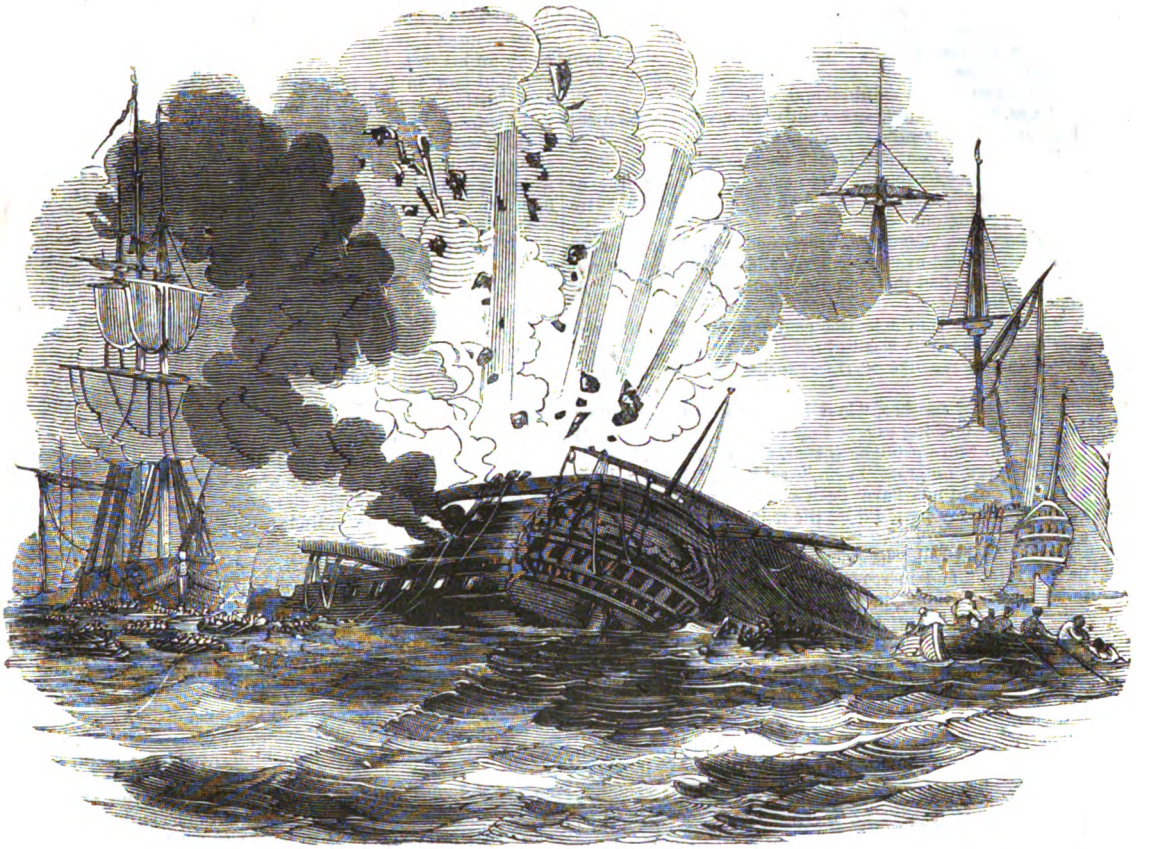

DESTRUCTION OF THE FRENCH FRIGATE.

"Those imps of Satan! I thought it was them ere yellow-skins."

"Curse their yelling—so it is," said Bill. "And to think of them skinny rascals frightening us like that!"

It was indeed the two Lascars, rushing from their search, and startling the echoes with their cries of grief and vengeance.

"Here they come!"

The smugglers gathered round the end of the passage through which they were coming, and endeavoured to pierce the gloom beyond.

They could see the dim light of the lamp carried by one of them, but the halo around it seemed to deepen the darkness.

At last they reached the vault.

A wailing cry again burst from their throats as they laid on the stone floor something that they had borne between them.

The smugglers started back with a cry of horror and surprise as the lascar uncovered the burden they had brought.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DISCOVERY OF HAMET'S DEAD BODY.—SIR MILES CRESSINGHAM IN DANGER. — DEPARTURE OF THE SMUGGLERS.—THE AFFRAY.

'Tis he!" exclaimed some of the smugglers as they recognised the features, fixed in death of Hamet, the Lascar.

"And dead too," exclaimed the others.

"Murdered—killed—" yelled the Asiatics, with wild frenzied accents and wilder gesture.

"Who can have done this deed?" thoughtfully murmured the smuggler chief.

"Who?" shrieked Abdallah and Abdul in a breath.

"Aye, who?"

"He, the accused, the pariah," replied both in a state of excitement, bordering on insanity.

"Aye, is it so?" exclaimed the chief, turning sharply towards Sir Miles.

"Yes, oh sahib, it is true. He, only has passed through the secret passage. None other could be the murderer, none other thief," said Abdallah.

"Every thing gone, all gone, gold, silver, jewels, all gone, moon face too—she gone—gone," moaned Abdul.

"Ha!" said the smuggler. "All the valuables stolen, say you, that's bad, and the girl flown?"

"I'm thinking, Captain," said Bill, who, as eldest smuggler, generally acted as spokesman for the rest, "that the place 'll be too hot for us. Depend on t, somebody's scented us out.

"It is strange indeed," said he, who we will now style captain, "very strange."

Then striding up to Sir Miles Cressingham, who had remained all this time a silent and surprised spectator, he said in threatening tones—

"Hark ye, sir somebody, if, as we suspect, you are at the bottom of this ere buisness, look out for squalls, for as sure as my name is Ben Langton. if you prove a traitor, a traitor's death you die."

"Fellow, I know not to what you allude; till now, I

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never knew of your existence. And," continued Sir Miles, "had I known such a tribe of scoundrels existed beneath my very house, I would have taken measures to have exterminated them, without venturing alone into their clutches."

"Oh, you would, would you."

"Aye, that I would, and what's more, will the moment I get quit of your pleasant company."

"Well, that's cool and frank, any how."

Sir Miles deigned no further parley, but fixing his eyes on the ground, took not the slightest notice of what else might be going on.

"Vengeance, vengeance," screamed the Lascar, now losing all control over their fierce and sanguinary nature.

"Silence," cried the captain, "enough we've had of that howling."

"Yes," said Bill, "if the gemman did kill the old hunks, I dare say it was in his own defence, for the ugly thing was always like a tiger springing nd flying at every one."

"Aye," said another, "look how he killed poor Tom Hachett, for nothing except that he was in a passion. I allays owed him a grudge for that, the old villain."

"Well, it's no great harm," said the Captain, "for the devil would not have been a worse master than he was, and, for my part, I'd let the man who killed him go scot free.

"And," said Bill, "he's done us a good turn in ridding us of a tyrant, and moreover saved us from a long voyage to India, where the yellow devil was going to take us."

"There's one thing to be remembered," said the captain, "and that is—how came he here? and are we betrayed and discovered?"

"Aye, that's to be overhauled to be sure."

"If he has betrayed us he must die!"

"Yes, that's sartin."

The Lascars, during this brief discussion, had not ceased their lamentations, and now that they saw a possibility of their prey escaping, rage and passion reached its height.

"A pity," said Bill, "the gemman did not rid us of these yellow imps as well."

"Aye, we shall do no good till they follow their master," said one of the smugglers.

With a yell of fury the Lascars sprang from the side of the corpse of their master, and both flung themselves on Sir Miles.

So sudden was the attack, that Sir Miles, whose back was towards them, was borne heavily to the ground.

His arms being still tied, he lay helpless and at their mercy. He felt the hot, quick breath of the panting fiends upon his face. He beheld the lurid glare of vengeance and hate in their eyes. He saw the flashing steel as it ascended with the uplifted arm. A moment more and the blow would fall. There was no hope, no deliverance. He closed his eyes, but no prayer came from his heart; he thought not of his numerous crimes and the account he should presently have to render before the great judge. To die now, it was terrible, but not because of the past, alas no, Sir Miles loathed death because it destroyed all the schemes and hopes he had looked for in the future.

"Die, die, Yengheese dog!" hissed they in his ear, as they brought their long daggers down.

All this had not taken a moment in action, though we have been longer in describing it.

Bill had dashed after the Lascars the moment they flung themselves on Sir Miles, and as their flashing steel was about to plunge into the prostrate man's heart, a blow like a sledge hammer from Bill's huge fist laid the howling Abdallah some distance off sprawling on the floor: a second blow, equally prompt on Abdul, sent him in the opposite direction.

"No, no, ye ugly imps, you shan't murder an Englishman in that cowardly fashion," said Bill, standing over the rescued Sir Miles and shaking his head and his fists at the same time.

Ere he could utter another word, Abdallah had regained his feet, and with a cry like a panther flew at Bill.

"Steady my hearty," says Bill to himself as he staggered a few paces back from the concussion caused by the Lascar's body against his own, then, with a well directed blow planted between the Lascar's eyes, he knocked him clean off his feet.

Abdul now in his turn sprang upon Bill, and clinging and twisting his lithe form round the burly smuggler, defied his utmost strength to shake him off.

Bill's companions had scarcely taken any notice of the struggle till now, when seing that he really was in danger from the vengeful and savage Lascars, they hastened to interfere.

Round and round Bill went whirling his would-be murderers in all directions, as if they weighed nothing—still they clung to him, but so incessantly had the sturdy smuggler endeavoured to shake them off, they had become almost breathless and giddy, and in vain attempted to use their daggers.

At last they feel for Bill's heart, and relaxing their grasp they are about to strike, but, quick as thought, the moment he felt their hold loosen, he, with a dexterous and sudden jerk, threw them off.

Again they rush forward.

Bill draws a pistol from his belt.

A flash, a loud report awakening a thousand echoes in the cave, a cry of anguish, and Abdallah, leaping high in the air, falls to the floor a lifeless corpse,

As the wreath of smoke slowly rises, Abdul is seen struggling in the grasp of Bill.

"No, no, you varmint, I've got tight hold of you now. It's no use your twisting about like that."

Frantic and furious were the efforts of Abdul to reach the heart of Bill, who held him off at arms length; but Bill's choler was up, and he thought it high time to settle the struggle. Suddenly catching the Lascar's wrist, he twisted it till with a howl of pain the dagger dropped from his nerveless grasp: thon stooping, he caught hold of him by the waist, and raising him high above his head, he brought the unfortunate wretch with fearful velocity to the ground, dashing his skull violently on the rough stones. Again he raised him—again the body descended—a noise like the crashing of bone was heard—blood and brains lay scatt red on the floor, and the last of the Lascars lay a stiffened corpse.

"Well, I'm blowed," said one smuggler.

"Why, Bill, you had a squeak for it," said another.

"Yes, the slippery devils gave me a little trouble," said Bill, wiping his forehead. But there, there's an end of them now, and the ship's ours now, eh captain."

"Yes, Bill, I think it's ours now sure enough."

"Now mate," said Bill to Sir Miles, who, in a sitting position had watched the late affray with some interest, "you're all right now, they can't hurt you any more."

"Thank you fellow, you certainly saved my life, and I will not forget you for it."

"Oh, that's all gammon, I'd lay a ship's cargo to a glass o' grog, that you thinks no more about it now. Maybe you'll get me hanged the first chance you get."

And Bill grinned in a devil-me-care fashion, as if it mattered little to him what might turn up.

"No, no, my man, if my hands were not tied, I would reward you now, but, perhaps, you are all lawless enough to help yourselves to what I have about me."

Sir, we are not thieves," sternly said the captain, who now approached.

"Indeed," sarcastically exclaimed Sir Miles.

"No, we only trade, and defy any iniquitous law."

"You cheat the revenue then."

"Or, if you like it plainer, we are smugglers."

"Of course they never steal."

"Certainly not," said the captain.

"Then why rob me of my liberty?"

"Well, that's a different matter."

"Oh, indeed."

"Yes, you see we suspect you may be a spy, preparing to betray us to the government, and if we liberate you now, you may inform against us, and ere we can sail beyond reach, a revenue cutter may overhaul us. So by

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way of precaution, you will take a trip with us, and when we reach a French port you shall be liberated, upon my honour."

"Curse upon your honour," cried Sir Miles, again bursting with rage. "How dare you kidnap an English gentleman. By heavens it is too bad."

"Now it's no use putting yourself in a passion, because we are not the men to stand any nonsense," said the captain.

"Accursed fate to bring all this to pass. To thwart me thus," murmured Sir Miles to himself.

"So you may as well make up your mind to sail early to-morrow morning, for go we must, and you with us."

Turning on his heel, the smuggler captain left Sir Miles to his reflection and his anger.

And bitter and disappointed indeed were the thoughts indulged in by Sir Miles.

"All has gone wrong, since that accursed Herbert Mandeville crossed my path. Oh, that I may yet wreak my full vengeance upon him." soliloqized Sir Miles. "Oh, he shall rue it when once he falls in my power."

The smugglers having placed the three dead bodies out of sight, and made the place what they termed snug, now seated themselves as before to play and drink the hours away till the time for their departure arrived.

They were fully occupied and engrossed in the game they were playing, when Bill, who had not joined the revellers, came up to Sir Miles.

"Well mate," said he, still in the mumps, eh ?"

Sir Miles made no answer.

"Come, cheer up, don't give way to melancholy. Why it's only a matter of five or six hours, and then you'll be out of limbo."

"Five or six hours is a matter of great moment to me," said Sir Miles, in a bitter tone.

"Is it though," said Bill, with a comical expression in his eyes, something betwixt sympathy and drollery.

"Yes."

"Well, it can't be helped, but, I tell you what, I'll make you as comfortable as I can, cos, I've taken a liking to you for settloing that yellow vagabond there," said Bill, pointing to where the body of Hamet had been lying.

"I had no hand in his death, man," said Sir Miles, sternly and impatiently.

"You didn't ?"

"No,"

"Then, who did ?"

"How the devil should I know."

"But you came through the passage."

"Yes"

"Who else could ha' killed him ?"

Sir Miles shrugged his shoulders, as if to close any further parley, but Bill was not to be put off.

"How did you get into the passage, then ?"

"From my own house."

"What, does it lead to a house."

"Yes."

"The devil it does," exclaimed Bill, now all astonishment.

"And," said Sir Miles, "I might with equal right demand of you how you fellows come here, since it all belongs to the house and domains of which I am lord ?"

"Well, we came from the sea."

"So I supposed," was the sarcastic reply,

"Yes, and—but it's quite a yarn how we came to find this place," said Bill. "Shall I tell it you ? Maybe you would like to know."

"Yes, by all means. I certainly am curious to know the meaning of much that has transpired since I have been confined here."

"Well, I'll just go and wet my scuppers first and then I ll be back in a jiffey, Shall I bring you a drop, it'll keep you from biling over."

"No, no—away with you."

Bill soon returned as he had promised, and puffing out a cloud of smoke from a pipe of tobacco he had just lighted. he sat down b side Sir Miles.

"Well, you see, it was a matter of three or four years ago, I'm not certain which, that I and Tom Hackett, and the captain, and several others. were a talking together on the beach down here, a looking at the sea which was beautiful clear and calm, when we spied out a strange sail coming in with the tide. She had her sails set, but they were of no manner of use to her, for there was not a breath of air stirring and they hung lazily and loose like. It looked very lubberly; they should have reefed 'em, and made all look ship-shape. Well, in course we all looked at the ship and began speculating on who she could be that sailed in such slovenly trim, and what she could want on this part of the coast."

"Well continued Bill, occasionally pausing to take a draw at his pipe, "we stood there till the evening, and as it grew dark and the stars began to peep out, the strange vessel came near enough to the land to give us a hail. But it was a strange lingo, one we couldn't make out, but taking no notice of that we gave them a 'aye, aye' back again.

"In a little while they dropped anchor, and then a boat put off, and a few strokes soon brought it to the beach. As the keel grated on the sand a strange-looking figure leaped out followed by two others just like the first only they didn't have such fine clothes on.

"'My eye!' says Tom Hackett, 'what's a coming now.'

"Belay your jawing tackle," says I, "maybe it's the Great Mogul that we've heard so much talk about, come to see us !

"Looking round with little fierce eyes, the first one walked up to us and spoke in English arter all, though how he could speak it passes my comprehension considering he came from the Ingees, Says he—

"'Sailors, I want men to work that ship, here's money for you !'

"And taking a bag from his pocket he jingled a lot of money in our faces.

"Now we all of us hadn't had much luck lately, and what little we did was in helping the smugglers that might run in a cargo there and getting a share of the swag. But the calm weather had kept them off rather, for stormy and dark nights are the best for us, and instead of that they had been fine and starlight.

"So after looking at the bag of money and then at each other, we began to bite like gudgeons at a bait.

"Well, says him who's our captain now, 'what's the profession of the ship—where is she bound to ?'

"Anywhere—everywhere, where gold is to be got,' said the little furriner.

"At last it came out that he was a smuggler: him a Ingeeman, too, so as our inclination were that way, we closed with him, and instsatl of sharing the cargo with us he gave us lots of money. Well, we shipped on board that very night, and a breeze soon after springing up, we set sail, and before morning were out of sight of Blackwater.

"Of course you may believe what a devil of a mess we found the ship in, for the rascals that were already on board were a pack of scowling yellow skins who did nothing but squat and chew opium. Howsumever, we soon made all taut, and they went on pretty smoothly till one day Tom Hackett was on duty on the upper deck, when the Mogul or Ingeeman that was our skipper flew in a rage about something. My eyes! you should have seen his ugly mug when he was riled ; the very devil could not have been worse than him. He stamped, he swore, and his eyes rolled in such a curious sort of fashion that Tom could not help laughing at him. But poor Tom never laughed again. The little yellow fiend whipped out a round kind of sword he wore, with a devilish keen edge, and slit Tom's wizend in a jiffy. In course we were all jolly angry at that, and would have sarved him out, but he raved and screamed till all the other yellow devils were round him, all well armed too, while we weren't

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so many as them by a good half and almost unarmed. So we swallowed the pill and passed it over, more especially as he said afterwards he was very sorry and wouldn't ha' done it only he was in a passion, and then he gave us a lot of money to drink his health and say no more about it.

"Well, we'd been at this kind o' life for some time, when we run one of our ventures in here, and our skipper, who was always prowling about all by himself, accidentally discovered an opening in the rocks which could be reached at high water. It was a part of the cliff inaccessible from the land, and sure enough when the tide was high there was a gap or channel in the rocks wide enough for our ship to pass through, and when the tide ran out the water inside was enough and to spare to float her.

"We were all astonished at the place, and wondered how it was it had never been discovered before. So by skilful steering we managed to lay our vessel in dock as it were. And very snug it was too, for not a bit of her could be seen from any point outside, and to add to our master's delight, we discovered further in this cave and the passage yonder.

"After a while, Hamet, for that was the name he went by, though I believe he was some sort of prince in his own country, fell in love with some gal in London, and he got so foolish and so jealous that he was allays a torturing himself about it night and day, and never sleeping a wink. So what does he do but buys heaps of splendid things fit for a queen and brings them all here. Then he sets his yellow skins to work, and they made a fine palace somewhere up there through that passage. He would not let any of us see it but the captain, who was his leftenaut you know, and he says it was magnificent.

"After it was finished and all ready, we sails to London, and sure enough he brings his gal, all insensible like, on board. We gets back here and places her in this palace.

"Well, we hadn't been here long afore he hears that he's come into a fortin in the Ingees. So he sends all his yellow-skins off to prepare for his arrival—all but those two that I was obliged to settle just now; and then he gave us orders to prepare for a voyage to the Ingees, too.

"Now, that wasn't particular to our own liking; yet we was afraid to go agin him, especially as he paid us well. Then he goes in there to bring the gal out; for he was going to take her away with him: and we were to wait for his coming in the morning, when the tide would be up, and we should be able to set sail out of our secret harbour.

"The rest you know," said Bill. "Now we find he's been murdered; but who the devil did it, if you didn't, I can't think. And we are not sorry, you may be sure, at the turn of luck that has given us a fine little ship of our own, and rid us of a devil of a tyrant."

"A very curious narrative," said Sir Miles, musing. "But, now you have told me of the secret entrance from the sea, I shall, when free, be compelled to reveal it to the authorities. Thus you have unwittingly betrayed yourselves and comrades."

"Oh, no—we intend to quit the cave now. The moment you popped upon us we felt that others might soon follow. No, no—it won't do for us now."

"So saying, Bill rose from his seat, and, walking towards the outlet to the sea, disappeared for a brief interval; but, presently returning, he hastily walked up to his comrades.

"Now, captain and messmates, if we're to sail, now's the time. Another hour, and the tide will be on the turn."

"Aye, Bill—is it so?" said the captain, hastily rising.

"Yes, captain."

All was now bustle and activity; and half an hour found the smugglers prepared and ready: for the position of the vessel afforded every opportunity to load or unload, so that there was scarcely anything but themselves to prepare.

Sullenly and gloomily, Sir Miles Cressingham walked on board. He felt it was useless to attempt resistance, and, accordingly, resigned himself to his fate.

It was still dark, though the stars sparkled brilliantly above, and the cool morning breeze just moved the water enough to make the reflected starlight dance upon the waves in fantastic style.

Silently the smugglers performed their duty on board of the vessel. The plashing water against the hull, and the running of the ropes through the hawseholes, were the only noises heard. Presently the little bark slips through the rocky pass, and, with a plunge, as if rejoicing at her liberty, dances over the crested waves.

Quickly the sails are loosened; for a moment they hang; then slowly they belly out. The wind has filled them, and, like a hound from the leash, she bounds on her way to France.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE RUINS OF THE HOUSE AT BLACKWATER.—SEARCH FOR SIR MILES. — THE FUNERAL. — LADY BESS. — CONSCIENCE.—HER FLIGHT.

GREAT was the consternation at the village of Blackwater, at the fearful conflagration that had destroyed Sir Miles Cressingham's mansion. Such a fire had not been known in that part of the country in the memory of any present inhabitant.

Nothing could stop the progress of the flames, and it was not till every particle of combustible material had been consumed, that exhausted for want of feeding they at last succumbed. Then it was that the sad havoc made by the fire could be observed. The walls of three sides alone were standing, the rest lay a confused heap of smoking rubbish.

When the fire was completly subdued, search was make for any thing of value; but presently it was whispered about that Sir Miles Cressingham had not been seen or heard of since the fire.

Tne first impression was that he must have perished in the flames, which as time wore on and no tidings were learnt of him became a certainty.

There was a great deal of anxiety and horror manifested at the conviction that Sir Miles had met with an untimely and fearful death.

There were none, it is true, that felt any grief at his loss, for he was too much feared to be liked, and the rumours of his numerous crimes, made many look upon the manner of his death as a just punishment for his crimes, and a warning to others. But among the gentry, though they bore no liking or respect for the man, there was a feeling akin to sympathy, for was he not of their order, and consequently extraordinary efforts were made to discover his remains, so that the last duties to the dead might be performed with due solemnity.

Workmen were engaged from all parts to clear away the rubbish in the ruins, and to look carefully for the bones of Sir Miles.

If Sir Miles had perished in the flames, they knew that they must find his bones, for had not the doctor informed them that it was highly improbable that the bones would be consumed.

So the men worked, and the gazing crowd of idlers watched.

At last a discovery was made.

They found a collection of bones in one place.

The y were carefully collected. And a medical man pronounced them human.

There was now no doubt but that the unfortunate baronet had perished in the flames.

But some of the men who had assisted to dig the bones out of the ruins, and who had knowu Sir Miles, shook their heads.

"Sir Miles was a bigger man than that."

"Yes, to be sure—them's not his bones."

"Noa, noa."

But the gentry were satisfied. And there was no immediate heir to dispute with. So the funeral was

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ordered, and in the course of a day or two, attended by the gentry of the neighbourhood, and in splended state the bones of poor Spider were laid in a magnificent tomb, of the family vault of the Cressingham, at the ancient church of Blackwater.

There was one, however, that followed that grand and pompous showthat ushered one out the world, who if not a mourner was at least full of anxiety and bitterness.

This was Lady Bess.

She of all that crowd knew that the bones they followed were those of a murdered man. Much as she disliked the Spider, his untimely end made her at least softer in feeling towards him. And a ferocious impulse made her determined to obtain justice against the cruel blood-thirsty slayer.

Sir Miles's strange disappearance filled her with surprise and fear. Where could he be if not killed in the fire. Her impression was that he had not been sacrificed in the flames. Yet where could he be? He had no need to secrete himself. Altogether it was a mystery she could not fathom.

Old Maynard could give no intelligence whatever concerning his master. So it was put down as certain, that on a particular day Sir Miles Cressingham met with his untimely death at a terrible conflagration that consumed his mansion, and that his remains were afterwards collected and interred in the family vault at the neighbouring church.

Lady Bess had no further desire or need to stop at Blackwater longer. The place was loathsome to her. The horrible end of Atkins, though it gratified her revenge, filled her with fear and terror. The scene at the fire haunted her day and night; and life was fast becoming, as it ever does with the guilty, an insupportable burden.

"I did not kill him," she murmured to herself. "It was not I who fired the house."

But it would not do. The striving to persuade herself that he met his end through other means than hers, only added to her inward knowledge that his death lay at her door.

The still small voice was ever whispering to her, "murderess! murderess!" and her frightened soul beheld the fatal beam already in imagination, beneath which murderers atone to the law for the blood they have shed—already the myriad of stony, cruel eyes were gazing and watching her dying agony,

She closed her eyes, as if to shut out the view—but in vain—it was still as vivid.

"What shall I do?" she murmured, in broken despairing accents.

Then she thought of Spider. At first she had rejoiced at his death, because it had removed the only witness of her crime: but now the fearful weight of guilt seemed too much for her to bear alone. She wished she had somebody to share it with—somebody to whom she might cling to as a partner in guilt, bound by the ties of bloodshed—not blood.

But her regret was useless. Spider was beyond mortal judgment. His amorous glances were quenched in the vacant stare of death for ever.

"Oh! that I might recal the bitter, bitter past, and live as I now see that I should," she murmured to herself. "But it cannot be. My hands are stained in blood. My soul is dark with the shadow of murder."

Her punishment had indeed commenced. The fearful communings of her spirit had awakened her slumbering conscience, and remorse, deep and terrible, filled her with agony.

Yet if we were to analyze the remorse of conscience that now oppressed the soul of Lady Bess, we should find, without doubt, that her anguish was more the result of the terrible consequences that might ensue than sorrow for the crime that she had been guilty of. She was not so full of regret at the accomplishment of her revenge, as she was at the idea that a day of retribution must certainly follow.

As she tossed restlessly on her sleepless pillow that night, her mind was made up, and she determined to return to London, and endeavour in the vortex of dissipation and excitement to drive the tortures of conscience from her soul.

Accordingly the morning light beheld her steal forth from the humble inn in which she had found shelter since her flight from Sir Miles's house, and with a furtive look towards the charred ruins that loomed beyond the village in mute accusation against her, she turned down the road leading southward—to London.

She had not far to wander ere green and shady lanes and bright meadows greeted her sight, bounded by dark and sombre woods.

Unconsciously her footsteps went off in the direction of the forest. The old, old days of freedom and innocence came back vividly to her memory, when as a roving and frolicsome gipsy girl she had strayed through brake and fern, free as the timid fawn.

Why did she stray in that direction? Did she, guilty creature that she was, imagine that the present was a dream which would dispel when she again trod the wild flowers of the forest, and leave her free and innocent?

Alas, no, if she had asked herself the question she could not have answered it. A mysterious influence she could not controul compelled her to seek the grassy glades over which the giant oaks and beeches were now waving their leafy heads.

She reaches the wood. Its mysterious solitude awed her. The beating of her own heart sounded so loud that it startled her. And when some slight movement of the leaves occurred, slight though it was, to her it sounded like her death warrant.

Presently she hears voices. In an instant she takes alarm, and already imagines that the law is on her track, and starts off as fast as her legs will carry her in an opposite direction.

Had she known that her own kindred were within call, how relieved would she have been. But it was not to be. And hastening to regain the high road, she pursued her dreary solitary way towards the great metropolis.

On—on—she went, and tired and footsore she reeched at last a large manufacturing town, among the busy crowds of which she felt a kind of security, for the solitude she had endured was unbearable, and the bustle and crowd served to distract her thoughts from her terrible secret.

Seeking an obscure place of refreshment, she entered and rested and refreshed herself—and learning in answer to her inquiries that a coach would leave in the evening for London. She decided to remain there till the evening, and then take the coach for the remainder of the distance, fortunathly for her that she was not distressed for the want of money, so that no difficulty presented itself to oppose her progress.

It was early in the morning when she entered London. The rain fell in that drizzling miserable penetrating way that seem especially to belong to our variable climate. When Bess entered the coach it was fine and starlight, but as the morning dawned and the end of the journey approached, they seemed to be entering the land of mist and wretchedness.

On arriving at the inn where the stage terminated, Bess again found herself afoot, and hurrying in the direction of St. Giles in the fields, she hoped soon to reach the abode of Gentleman Harry.

As she neared the thoroughfare leading from Holborn to St. Giles, she was surprised to observe dense crowds of people passing in the same direction.

Curious though she was to know the reason for such an assemblage of people, yet she refrained from questioning any of those around her. She dreaded to give utterance to her voice—it seemed to her as if it would betray her.

At last she is borne into the highway that intersects London from East to West, by the dense crowd that now surrounds her.

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A strange excitment is apparent in the crowd, they laugh, chat, joke, swear, and blaspheme, each according to their tastes and teachings. A loud and ceaseless hum is in the air—heavy and wet though it is. Presently a distant shout rents the air. It ceases not, but increases in volume as it appears to travel nearer and nearer. The crowd in which Bess is fixed cease their ribaldry and remarks, and they whisper one to the other—

"Here they come!"

Though almost fainting from the pressure of the crowd, Bess still maintained her position, and strove every nerve to ascertain and see for herself what has caused so large an assemblage.

A deafening shout—a waving of hands and caps—and an increased pressure—told Bess that the cause of the crowd that was now passing.

Standing on tiptoe she gazes fascinated on the scene before her. Then, with a low moan, she fell back pale and senseless into the arms of those behind her.

"Halloa! here's a woman fainted."

"Room—room—give her air."

And rough yet humane hands bore her safely out of the crowd.

The sight that had so agitated Bess was a cart containing a coffin, on which was seated a man with his face to the tail, round his neck was a rope; beside him sat the executioner and the prison chaplain. It was the procession of a doomed man on his way to Tyburn. A strong guard of soldiers went before and after the cart.

With jaunty and defiant air the unfortunate wretch bowed and smiled at the crowds on either side of him as they cheered and huzzaed him on his progress.

Like a thunderbolt did the meaning of the passing procession burst upon Lady Bess's comprehension.

In a moment, the horrors of the scene before her became invested with a dreadful and prophetic significance. And then, as we have just seen, she sank overcome with the fear that closed ice-like round her heart, and became insensible.

When she again recovered her senses, she found she was in a neighbouring public house surrounded by men and women of rough and suspicious exterior.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE OFFICERS OF JUSTICE.—RED REUBEN CHARGED WITH MURDER.—THE ARREST.

With a glance of dread and apprehension Mrs. Jenkins looked towards the door of her room, as if expecting, that when it opened it would reveal some dreadful and horrible presence.

There was no ceremony—no time lost in politeness. The handle was turned and the door thrown open. Two men stepped into the room, and with a quick sharp glance penetrated every corner in a moment.

They were both middle-aged men, stout and athletic in appearance, with mufflers round their throats, and a restless penetrating glance ever present in their eyes.

"Hanged if I don't think that the bird has flown," said one of the men.

"Looks like it, sure enough," said the other.

"I say, missus," said the former speaker, "where's that young red-head that was here just now?"

"Who do you mean, sir?" asked Mrs. Jenkins, in a trembling tone of voice.

"Now, none of that gammon, old lady, you knows well enough who I mean."

"Indeed I do not."

"Well, we'l enlighten you then," said the man. "We are Bow-street runners, and we are after a most owdacious murderer."

"Good heavens, why do you come here?" cried Mrs. Jenkins, now fairly alarmed.

"Didn't I just tell ye to find a murderer."

"Look here," said the other, "there's been a murder done at Stepney. A parson has had his brain-pan knocked in, and we are on the scent of the chap that did it."

"Yes, and we've traced him here to this house," interrupted the other.

"My God, what can all this mean," said Mrs. Jenkins, as the truth gradually began to dawn on her mental faculties. "Is it my poor boy Ralph, who you suspect?"

"That's it—he's our man."

But he is not here. He went out a little while ago."

"Did he? well we'll have a squint about here first."

So saying the two looked in every conceivable spot they thought it possible Ralph could hide, but they found him not.

"Well, he's not here, that sartin."

"But," cried Mrs. Jenkins, "he is not guilty—what he did was only in defence of another."

"Oh, you admit his guilt then," said one of the men sharply. "That's quite enough—there's no doubt now who did it."

All this time, Snowdrop had sat motionless and speechless. She could as yet hardly comprehend what had, or what was taking place.

"Oh sir," cried Mrs. Jenkins again, "it is some mistake I'm sure. He is not dead."

"Who?"

"Why, Mr. Graball."

"Oh, you seem to know all about it. I think we shall have to arrest you as an accessory."

At that instant Red Reuben returned, whistling as he ascended the stairs, so joyous and happy did he feel on this particular occasion, because Snowdrop was there, and he should presently behold her again.

As he burst into the room, he started back in surprise to see his mother and Snowdrop so pale and terrified, but ere he could enquire of them the cause, the two officers stepped from beside the door where Reuben had not observed them as he entered, and laying their heavy hands on his shoulder said—

"You are our prisoner."

"Prisoner!" echoed Reuben.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Wilful murder."

"Murder!" murmured Reuben.

With a timid frightened look, Reuben gazed round, then bursting into tears, he sank on a chair.

"Murder—murder," he repeated, in a vacant and wandering manner.

The officers dexterously slipped a pair of handcuffs on to his wrists.

"Now then young fellow we must be off—time presses—you know."

"Oh, Reuben, Reuben, cried Snowdrop. "This is all through me. Oh why was I not killed with my mother, instead of living to be a source of misery to my friends."

"No, no," said Reuden, brightening up again, "you are not the causo, you mustn't cry. Reuben glad to suffer for Snowdrop."

"Oh, pray sir, do not take him away," cried Snowdrop, appealing to the officers. He is not guilty of the crime you accuse him of. Indeed he is not."

"Very sorry, miss, but we must do our duty you know. It looks very black agin him."

"Alas, sir, it was in my defence that he dealt the blow, that has, as you say proved fatal. If any one is to blame it is me. I am the unhappy cause of this fatal issue."

"No, no, miss, we don't look for causes; it's the principals that we want, and the accomplices."

There was no further use of parley or remonstrance. Poor Reuben's fate was irrevocably sealed, and to a prison he must go.

It would be tiresome and fatiguing to detail all that was said by Snowdrop and poor Mrs. Jenkins to the

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officers, in the hope of persuading them of Reuben's innocence, and inducing them to forego their cruel errand. It was all to no purpose. The officers of justice were used to every wily endeavour to tempt to forget their duty for the sake of humanity, and were consequently doubly armed to resist any further attempt in the same direction.

So amid the wailings and tears of Snowdrop and Mrs. Jenkins (who really felt a maternal attachment towards the poor half-witted boy), and the reviling and "I knew they were no good" of the landlady, Reuben was dragged off to the receptacle of vice—to prison. With that most fearful of all charges over his head—that of murder.

"Good-bye mother. Good-bye Snowdrop. You won't forget poor Reuben, will you?"

"Oh, no," cried Snowdrop, with tears in her eyes. Never will I forget the only friend I have had since my childhood. Oh, what have I done that all those who befriend me should suffer for my sake—for my cause."

Reuben was gone.

Along the crowded streets, between the two astute officers, was he escorted to the home of the lost and degraded creatures of crime.

The people followed in droves.

"What's the matter?"

"Only a pickpocket, I suppose," said some.

But others who knew better whispered the terrible sentence—

"He's a murderer!"

Yes. Reuben was lodged in gaol, awaiting his trial for the wilful murder of Mr. Graball, as the coroner's inquest soon after brought it in.

There was no mistake about it. The blow that Reuben had dealt on the reverend scoundrel's skull had been a trifle too hard, or else the recipient's scull was too soft. At any rate, the minister's skull was fractured, and the insane passion that had existed in his mind previous to the infliction of the blow had done the rest. A state of fever had supervened, and completely nullified the attempts of the surgeons to restore him to health. The consequence was that he died.

Great was the horror and detestation that ensued among the pious frequenters of the Rev. Mr. Graball's ministry. Had it been a century or two before he would certainly have been canonized; but fortunately we escaped that infliction. Still the effect on the minds of those who believed and followed in his footsteps was most damaging towards the unfortunate accused.

He, poor fellow, was regarded as the greatest criminal in existence, the worst, in fact, that had ever cursed the world with his presence.

Consequently a terrible array of talent and wealth is brought to bear on the poor friendless lad.

The most illustrious barristers and counsel are to be employed to crush—to hurl from his place in the scale of humanity—the unfortunate victim of accident.

As yet none had heard his statement of the occurrence. For his half-witted nature seemed too absorbed in the contemplation of what was passing around him, without conceiving any plan of explaining away difficulties. He felt that he was not guilty of taking away a fellow creature's life in wantonness, and feeling how apparent was his innocence to himself, he could not imagine it was otherwise with those who knew him.

As for Mr. Jenkins, she was utterly confounded with the unfortunate and critical position of her step-son; and in what manner she could assist to extricate him she did not know. The dread of again coming in contact with her husband made her shrink from entering the world, and appearing in what must needs be public character.

But widely different was it with Snowdrop. The tenderness and sensibility of her disposition brought out the real strength that lay dormant within her; and, resolute and determined, she resolved to leave nothing untried to save poor Reuben from his impending fate.

CHAPTER LIX.

TOM STARLING ON BOARD THE FRENCH FRIGATE—THE STRANGE SAIL—THE PURSUIT—THE FRIGATE ON FIRE—TERRIFIC EXPLOSION.

Tom Starling lay wounded and insensible on the French frigate that had aided so effectually in his capture. He was carefully and skilfully looked after by the surgeon of the ship, in obedience to the order of the captain, whose soul revolted against any act that could be construed into a resemblance of inhumanity.

Tom was the only prisoner. His shipmates and his captain had succumbed to the severe nature of their wounds, and, in death, passed to immortal freedom.

Some days had elapsed ere Tom was able to comprehend or understand his whereabouts; and, in the meantime, the frigate, in pursuance of her duties, had cruised about some distance from where the "Susan" had ran foul of her.

It was about two bells—the men were mostly at their dinner—when Tom managed to stagger to the deck. It was the first time since his illness that he had felt the sea-breeze on his weather-beaten face; and, weak as he was, his form grew erect as the invigorating atmosphere diffused itself through his frame, and he felt as if he could once again tread the deck as of yore.

It was a glorious view—that noble ship speeding over the undulating waves, that sparkled in the noon-day sun. Far as the eye could stretch lay the bright green wrinkled surface of the sea; while above, a cloudless sky extended over all. To a sailor's heart it was indeed glorious and inspiring.

Tom revelled in the scene, and for awhile forgot that he was ill and weak, and a prisoner on board of a strange ship.

Presently a shout from the look-out man was heard, and, turning his gaze in the direction that was indicated Tom could just make out a sail at the extreme verge of the horizon.

In a moment all was bustle and confusion on board.

Somehow the excitable temperament of the inhabitants of La Belle France always overcomes them. They become lost to prudence or patience, and the inevitable result is failure. Perhaps, if the truth was known, they owe their inferiority on the sea to us from that very infirmity.

For a time Tom's gaze was fixed on the strange sail.

A hope, faint and doubtful, crossed his heart that the distant sail he beheld might conduce in some way to his deliverance.

But, as it slowly became more visible, his practised eye soon distinguished that it was no match for the ship he was now on board of.

His thoughts then for a time became diverted from dwelling on his present circumstances by observing the confusion that reigned around him, and listening wonder-struck at the incessant jabbering that the Frenchmen kept up, irrespective of rank.

"Well," thought Tom, "if there's all this fuss over a little ship like that, what can it be when they come across one of our seventy-fours!"

Time flew on, and the French ship was gradually lessening the distance that lay betwixt her and the strange sail. The day was near its decline, and the keen air, together with a rough sea, compelled Tom to descend to his berth again; for he had already exceeded the limit of his strength, and, from sheer exhaustion, he felt that he must retire.

Tired and fatigued, Tom soon fell asleep. But how long he slept he knew not. But he suddenly awoke by feeling a stifling sensation in his throat.

For a moment his faculties of thought were bewildered, and he could not think of anything rational. But as he became more thoroughly awake, he was aware that the atmosphere was heavy and oppresive.

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With difficulty he groped his way out of his berth The place was full of smoke and fearfully hot.

"Good God," exclaimed Tom, "the ship's on fire."

At last he reached the bottom of the main hatchway, and staggering on to the deck, he found as he expected, all the crew absorbed in the exciting chase of the strange sail, which was making all speed to allude their clutches.

"Fire! fire!" shouted Tom.

Words cannot paint the fearful panic that these terrible and ominous words caused.

In vain the officers shouted and screamed in their efforts to enforce the observance of discipline. All were too terror-stricken to heed them.

"To the boats! to the boats!" cried a hundred agonised voices.

There was a tremendous rush towards the boats. The captain, who alone, of that excited crew, remained cool and collected, shouted in vain to them to stay and endeavour to arrest the progress of the fire. On they went.

One of the boats is presently cut from the lashing and lowered. A hundred maddened cowards rushed over the frigates side, and hurled themselves into the boat, and the next instant it is swamped.

Fearful agonised shrieks rise from the ocean, as it sweeps over the boat that sinks with its frantic load.

Awe struck at the fatal scene, the remainder become somewhat cooler, and in obedience to the captain's commands, proceeded to ascertain where the fire was, and to what extent it had reached.

They soon returned however, terrified, and telling the captain that the entire ship is in flames from stem to stern, and that in a few more minutes the powder magazine will be in the circle of the destructive element.

This was enough. The ship was doomed. Nothing could save her now.

So the captain gave the command to lower the boats.

The embarkation was safely effected, and as the boats pushed off the flames burst out from all parts of the ship at once.

It was night.

No moon or stars illumined the scene.

When the flames burst from the ports of the French frigate, the scene became grand and terrible.

The red light shone over the deep into the faces of the scared Frenchman now pulling with all their might to avoid the dangerous vicinity of the burning mass.

And attracted by the illumination, several men-of-war who happened to be near (though previously, owing to the darkness, they had not been sighted), bore down towards the ill-fated ship to render what assistance they could,

Up sprang the flames, leaping up the rigging like salamanders. The masts had become solitary blackened poles. The forecastle is burnt nearly to the water's edge, and then a flash like lightning dazzles the eyes—a shock like an earthquake, which lifts the boats clean out of the water—a fearful noise like the report of a hundred broadsides—and then a torrent of fire shoots straight high up into the heavens—a shower of missiles falls pattering in the water—a loud hissing noise, and all is over. Black pitchy darkness reigns around. The noble French frigate has disappeared.

Paralysed and speechless, the men in the boats gazed long and earnestly where last they had beheld their ship, but not a vestige is visible, and the contrast and change from the late brilliant light to the present darkness renders the blackness of night deeper and denser.

Some time elapsed ere the men in the boats felt sufficiently composed to express their thoughts or feelings in words, and when they did their first utterance was a hope that the ships the explosion had revealed to them over night might prove friendly ones.

As if in answer to their wish, the clouds at that moment disappeared, and the stars gradually appeared followed at brief interval by the moon.

No sooner did the beams of Cynthia illuminate the trackless deep, than the ships seen before the explosion became again visible.

With a cry of joy and confidence the boats pulled towards them, for they saw at once that they were French, and in a few moments the crews were picked up, placed in safety on board. Danger, of course, was over, and for a time the rescued crew of the ill-fated ship enjoyed the pleasure and delight of freedom from danger.

CHAPTER LX.

FLORENCE AND CARRY LEAVE ENGLAND.—THEY ARRIVE AT BREST.—THEIR PROGRESS IN SEARCH OF THE ENGLISH ARMY.

When Michael reached the tent in the wood at Blackwater with his burden, he carefully and tendery placed it on the rough apology they had for a bed.

Close behind him followed the dog.

And some little distance farther on was Florence and Carry.

They had endeavoured to keep pace with Michael, but in vain. His young and nomadic kind of life had steeled his sinews and muscles, and he sped on in defiiance of fatigue.

When they all arrived at the tent they were struck with surprise and pity to behold the young and handsome form before them.

"Here, mother," said Michael, "here's a poor child that wants your care."

"What is it, my son?"

"Oh, a poor fellow who's been shipwrecked. Look how bad he looks. Upon my word I think he's dead."

"Ah," said the old woman, "there's no mistaking that. He's dead sure enough. Look! his eyes are fixed, his hands clenched, and his face like snow. He'll feel trouble no more."

"No, indeed. I think not."

"Alas! alas! must all in that fated ship perish," exclaimed Florence, with tears in her eyes. "Is there really no hope?"

"The old gipsy shook her head.

"May be he's not quiet dead," said Michael. "Let's see if something won't revive him. Come lass," continued Michael, turning to his wife. "See if ye can't do something for the poor creature."

It did not need Michael's persuasion to induce the girl to render what assistance she could, for her own kindly instincts had already prompted her to act.

The old gipsy as if ashamed of her own want of sympathy now bestirred herself. Yet grumbling audibly the while.

"I tell ye, it's no use. He's stone dead."

"Oh, don't say that mother," exclaimed Michael and his wife in a breath.

Sadly Florence and Carry looked on the poor unfortunate youth before them. He was dripping wet, the saline particles clinging to his hair.

The two gipsy women now did all that their knowledge of leech craft could suggest to them. Michael stood apart with arms folded across his breast.

Florence's attention was now drawn to the dog, who, as if gifted with the reason of a human being, stood gazing with his large eyes upon the efforts of the women to restore animation to the stricken form before him.

"Poor dog," murmured Florence, carressing and stroking his shaggy head.

Turning his eyes on Florence, as if thanking her for her sympathy, he licked her hand, then resuming his gaze on the drowned boy, shook his head as if to inform them that he was too much occupied with the great grief before him to heed any kind attention.

"I told you so," said the old crone, after a quarter of an hour spent in endeavouring to restore animation to the lifeless form before them—"I told you it'd be no use."

"Alas!" said the younger, "I fear it is as you say. I think he'll never open his eyes again."

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"AUNT, HERE IS MISS ABERY."

A low whine from the dog, showed that he comprehended at once what the woman had said, and rising from the place where he had been watching, he went to the dead youth, and sat upon his haunches, at the feet of him he had loved so well.

Grieved and depressed, Florence and Carry retired to rest, though not to sleep. The terrible scene of the shipwreck, and the melancholy death of the unknown youth, filled them with terrible foreboding as to what might happen to them in the future.

"Oh," thought Florence, "what fearful episodes are passing in my short life, since the death of my poor father. When, when shall I be at peace? Alas, I fear, not till the dark grave closes over all."

Carry was equally agitated; but her nature, though less fierce, was not yet tamed, and she sat moody and discontented, and involuntarily her thoughts flew to Snowdrop: and a bitterness of spirit weighed upon her at the unkindness and contumely, that had been cast on her by Mrs. Barton.

"If," thought she, "I have done wrong, it is no reason that I should always be treated as a guilty thing."

The night passed away, unrefreshing to all, and the morning's light came as a relief to those in that little tent. Florence and Carry found the shipwrecked youth laid out for burial. The old crone and her daughter had performed the last duties that are due to the dead, and there, calm and beautiful even in death, he lay, with his only friend, the dog, sitting patiently beside him.

In the course of the morning, Michael prepared a grave, and shortly afterwards, after the manner of the gipsy funerals, the unknown youth was placed in it—the loose earth soon hiding the uncoffined form from view.

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It was a mournful scene. These rough children of the forest, chanting in Romany, their requiems for the dead—while Florence and Carry stood mute and sorrowing. As the grave became filled up, the dog, who had never left his master's side, now gave a piteous whine, and then, as if he knew all was over, he walked up to Florence, and placed his nose in her hand.

"Poor faithful animal," she murmured, caressing him. "Yours is indeed a friendship that lasts until death."

They turned from the spot—now sacred as the resting place of the innocent dead.

After they reached the tent, there was much speculation among them as to who the strange youth could be; and in hopes of ascertaining, they examined the scanty garments that had clothed him, when dragged from the deep; but no clue was found that could lead to his identity; even the collar of the dog bore no mark or name.

Such being the case, it was idle to dwell longer on the subject. So the few articles that had belonged to the dead youth were tied up, and Michael directed the old crone to preserve them; but there was no doubt that at the first opportunity she would part with them for gain.

Florence and Carry now stated their wish and intention to go abroad, and sought to know from Michael how and when they could obtain a ship to take them to France.

But Michael's knowledge of aught but woodcraft was very small, and he stood a long time dubious as to what kind of answer he could make.

"Look here, Michael," said Carry; "can't you sell some of those valuable things that you brought from the underground palace, and convert it into money?"

"Well, I might if I took 'em to a fence; but then, he wouldn't give anything like their value."

"Well, if he gives something handsome for it, I won't mind about the difference in value. So see if you can dispose of them for us."

"I must go to Lunnon, then."

"I suppose you must."

"And if you want to find a ship for furrin parts, why you'd better come to Lunnon with me."

"No, no," said Carry, who dreaded meeting some of those who had known her in her infamy; "no, no, we must get a vessel to take us from anywhere rather than London."

Michael looked surprised; but as nothing further was said, he went in search of a horse and cart. But suddenly he remembered the fearful charge that hung over his head, and that rewards were being offered for his apprehension. He dared not show himself in London! What could he do?

Returning to where he had left Carry and Florence, he stammered out something about not being able to go to London. Carry was surprised, being ignorant of the reason; but Michael presently explained the false position he was placed in, and related the particulars of the murder at Epping Forest.

"But you—you did not murder the old man?" said Carry; "did you?"

"No, lady," said Michael, with some emotion. "I am innocent of that crime, and yet I was arrested and charged with it."

Florence's whole nature seemed to turn, as she recognized in the description of the murder the scene of her own abduction.

"Then they murdered that poor old man, did they? Oh, cruel, cruel monster, that could not feel pity for thy grey hair!" sobbed Florence, deeply agitated with the remembrance of that fearful night.

"I am innocent, lady," said Michael. "That deed does not rest at my door—indeed it doesn't!"

"I believe you, Michael," replied Florence. "I do not think, however rough your nature may be, that cruelty forms a part of your character."

"Well, what can be done now?" said Carry. "If Michael cannot go to London, how are we to obtain money for these gaudy trifles?"

After musing awhile, Michael suddenly slapped his hand on his thigh, as if seized with a bright idea.

"I have it."

Carry and Florence looked inquiringly at him.

"When we hurried away from Lunnon, we passed through a good-sized town, not more than ten mile from here. I am thinking that we might find some one to buy these things there. And, what's better still, it's on the sea-shore, where you might easily get a lift in a ship, I think."

"The very thing," said Carry.

"Shall I get a cart, then, that will take you as well?"

"Oh, yes; we'll all go together," exclaimed Carry.

Accordingly, Michael went to the village of Blackwater, to see if he could hire a horse and cart, while Florence and Carry make what preparations they can for the journey.

When Michael returned, he was hastening to tell them of what had occurred.

"Oh, ladies, the big house yonder was burnt down last night!"

"What house?" exclaimed both at once.

"Sir Miles Cressingham's house."

"Sir Miles Cressingham?" said Florence.

"Yes, and they do say that he's burnt in the fire, too."

"Just Heaven! how inscrutable are thy ways. Has retribution fallen on him at last, and my poor wronged father avenged?"

Buried in the thickest part of the forest, and engrossed with the efforts to restore the poor shipwrecked boy, none of the party at the gipsy encampment had noticed the conflagration that had alarmed the whole county—consequently they were indeed startled and surprised to hear the news.

There was no time, however, for further expression of astonishment, and Michael having placed the valuable property, that had so recently belonged to Hamet, in the cart, Florence and Carry, followed by Michael, seat themselves in it, and in a few moments are beyond the shelter of the wood.

In due time, they arrived at the fishing town that Michael had alluded to; but ere they entered it, they alighted from the cart, and sought an obscure inn in the suburb, where they might pass the night, and refresh themselves without any fear of prying or inquisitive eyes.

Michael soon found, as he expected, one of his tribe in the town, pursuing his vocation of blacksmith. To him he partly confided, and asked his advice as to the disposal of what the blacksmith had no doubt was the proceeds of a robbery.

The blacksmith, fortunately, was able to relieve Michael of his difficulty, and accordingly directed him to a disreputable part of the town, where a small shop was kept by an old Jew, ostensibly to buy old ship stores, but really, to transact any business that might turn up for his advantage.

Here Michael, to his infinite relief, got rid of all the wealthy incumbrance, and received in exchange a large sum in gold, though infinitely below their real value.

The next search was to find a ship to convey the two ladies to a foreign port.

But it was now dark, or nearly so, and deeming it useless to attempt to find anything relating to ships then, he postponed further inquiries till the morning, and sought a place for rest and refreshment for the night.

Next morning, soon after dawn, Michael sallied forth, and mingling with the sailors at the quay, inquired the destination of the various vessels then taking in their freight.

Luckily he found one, a brig, that was bound to

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Brest; and after due inquiries, he ascertained that a passage could be obtained for the two ladies for a certain pecuniary consideration.

So far, all went well.

Michael now thought it high time to return to the suburbs where he had left Florence and Carry.

He found them in a nervous state of excitement, consequent upon his late arrival—their fears being that he might have met with some mishap—but his presence at once relieved them, and his account of his success did more, it encouraged them to hope that all would yet be well.

After securing the money that Michael brought with him, not forgetting a generous reward to him for his exertions, Carry immediately suggested to Florence that they should at once secure a berth on board the vessel that was bound for Brest.

On arriving, soon afterwards, at the town from whence they intended to take their departure, they went straight to the agent of the ship, and, after a a little bartering, which Carry carried on, settled the terms on which they were to be received as passengers.

It was at the time when war, in all its fierceness, existed between France and Great Britain. Yet the immense success of England's navy had so effectually cleared the seas, that though the French government proclaimed their ports in a state of blockade, it was, in fact, an empty protest. Therefore there was nothing extraordinary in a ship starting from an English port for the harbour of Brest, the more especially when the requirements of trade welcomed it, notwithstanding the differences of nationality. For the wars that devastated Europe in those days, were exulted in only by those who gained some selfish ends. And there were plenty of all nations, in spite of the feuds that might exist between their government, ready, willing, aye, and even anxious, that their mercantile relations should not cease.

Yet, there was no denying that danger hung over these transactions. Accident might at any moment throw an enemy, in the shape of an armed ship, in the way, and woe betide the unlucky blockade-runner then.

But frequent success had hardened those engaged in this perilous kind of seacraft, so that there was no diminution of the traffic.

It was in one of these vessels that Florence and Carry had secured a passage to France.

They, of course, were ignorant of all the doings in the political world.

They had some vague idea, or knowledge, that a war was in progress, and they felt morally certain that it was with the French nation; but beyond that they knew nothing.

They had no idea of war, other than two armies meeting in a field, and fighting till one or the other was defeated.

It never occurred to them that, in the trail of war followed miseries and horror inconceivable, that battles and combats were mere child's play compared to it.

Therefore, in embarking on board a ship bound for an enemy's port, they neither knew or imagined any other danger than that arising from the stormy deep.

In a few hours the anchor was weighed, and as the light land breeze caught the sails, the little brig sailed majestically out of the bay.

Florence and Carry stood on the deck; beside them the brave dog, that had been found with the wrecked youth, whose burial they had so recently witnessed under such romantic circumstances.

He had evidently attached himself to the two ladies, especially to Florence, to whom he had taken an extraordinary fancy; and when they left the encampment in the forest at Blackwater, he had followed them to this present time; and so pleased did Florence feel at this evidence of the friendship of the poor brute, that she determined that he should go whithersoever she went. And Carry coincided with her, "for" said she, he will prove not only a friend, but a protector."

Standing on the quay was Michael, gazing ruefully at the ship that bore away the two ladies who had been so kind and thoughtful to him, who was only an outcast.

His heart swelled with the inward emotion that the loneliness of his situation gave rise to.

Like the Ishmaelite of old, every man's hand was against him, yet he was guilty of no crime. And those who had looked kindly on him and his—who had treated him, and spoken to him as a human being, and a friend—were fast fading from his view.

The shades of evening gradually veiled the now distant ship from sight. And, depressed and lonely, Michael turned to retrace his steps, and rejoin his kindred in the forest of Blackwater.

As the wily and experienced skipper of the brig expected, the light of the following day found their peril almost over.

In the darkness of the night they had successfully evaded all the vessels inimical to their interests, and as the day broke they stood well in for the harbour of Brest.

It was an unimportant station at the period of which we write, and therefore was comparatively undefended.

The small battery that served for the defence of the town, not deeming itself called upon to attack all kinds of shipping without special orders, looked with complete unconcern on every mercantile arrival, perfectly oblivious to any dangerous consequences that might ensue.

So, when the captain of the brig sighted Brest, he knew he was comparatively safe, and, with pardonable joy and pride, entered the harbour with colours saucily flying.

Florence and Carry lost no time in landing.

Short as the voyage was, they had had quite enough of its roughness and inconvenience.

They bade the captain farewell, and entering the town, followed by the dog, sought for a place of refreshment.

After an interval spent in repose, with a due attention to the wants of nature, they inquired as to the whereabouts of the English army.

The conversation which here ensued was between Florence and the innkeeper's wife, the former having some knowledge of the French language, which she had acquired at school.

But her quick wit soon discovered that she had made some error in asking the question she did.

That mysterious capacity that exists in the eye to read another's thoughts, had revealed to Florence that her question had excited alarm and suspicion.

With great tact she changed the conversation, and simply asking for more refreshment, explained to Carry, when they were left alone, that they were evidently in ignorance of what had happened and what was happening.

After having sufficiently refreshed and rested themselves, they paid their reckoning and left, on the pretence of examining the curiosities of the place.

As soon as they were sufficiently beyond their late retreat, they entered another restaurant, and, calling for coffee and the papers, prepared to ascertain how they were to act.

After an hour's perusal of the literature of France, Florence saw at once the peril they were in, and at the same time discovered that the English army they desired to find was then encamped in Spain, with the French troops before it, so that to reach them they—

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Florence and Carry—must pass through the hostile lines of the "grande army."

Here was a dilemma.

And to make matters worse, they possessed no passport.

How, then, could they leave the city without detection, and being perhaps punished and cruelly treated as spies.

Bitterly Florence regretted the hasty manner in which they had taken their departure, without having first ascertained the probabilities that existed of their ultimate success.

But regrets were useless now.

What plan should they adopt?

After much time spent in thought, they decided to attempt to leave the city at night.

Accordingly, they sallied out, accompanied by the dog, who had been named Victor by the two ladies, and took their way through the dark and ill-paved streets towards the barrier.

On arriving at the gate, they found it closed, and in answer to their inquiries, were surlily told to begone, and not disturb good people at that unseemly hour.

There seemed now every probability that they had placed themselves in an awkward dilemma, and that they were in fact little better than prisoners.

Despair began to creep round their hearts, and a feeling of utter desolation came over them.

To be in the midst of a large population—an alien and a stranger—is, indeed, to be in the most wretched solitude.

Presently, like a beam of light over her soul, came the memory to Florence of one she had some knowledge of, who dwelt in that city.

"Oh! if he still lives, he will assist us, I'm sure," said Florence to Carry.

"Who do you mean, dear?"

"Monsieur Dupre, my French tutor," replied Florence. "I remember now that he came to this city to reside with his aunt. Oh! if my memory will serve me, we shall find him I know."

And Florence almost joyfully quickened her pace, until they met a passenger coming in the opposite direction.

To stop him and inquire the way to Rue St. Cyprian was the work of an instant.

The man civilly answered their queries, and directed them to the place, remarking that a few minutes walk would bring them to it.

They soon, as the man had said they would, arrived at the narrow turning designated by the name of St. Cyprian, and stopping before a dark and gloomy doorway, Florence gave a timid knock.

It was almost immediately opened by a surly and sour looking porter, attired in a half-military kind of livery.

"Does Monsieur Dupre live here?" asked Florence, in soft and persuasive accents.

After eyeing them suspiciously for a moment, he grunted an assent; and, leaving them still standing at the threshold, he retired to summon the gentleman inquired for.

Monsieur Dupre instantly made his appearance.

He was a young man of goodly exterior, and prepossessing appearance.

Advancing towards his two unknown visitors, he said,—

"To whom am I indebted for this visit?"

"Monsieur Dupre, do you not know me?" said Florence, eagerly.

"What, Miss Avery! Is it possible? Why—what is the meaning of this?" was the rapid exclamation of the young man.

"I and my friend here are in search of shelter and assistance. We are strangers in a strange city, and without a friend. I remembered that you resided here, and I thought I might trust in your well-known kindness of heart. Am I wrong?" and Florence looked beseechingly into his face.

"Oh, no," he replied. "I am only too glad to be of any assistance to one who has been a benefactor to me and mine. Pray command me in what you will."

At this moment, Mrs. Dupre, hearing voices at the door, came out to ascertain what could occupy her nephew's attention there.

The surly porter was still holding the door with one hand, and looking from behind it at the lady visitors with a glance full of suspicion.

As Mrs. Dupre approached, the young man turned round, and exclaimed,—

"Aunt, here is Miss Avery."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; is she not welcome to all—to everything that is ours?"

"Most welcome!" said the old lady, taking Florence by the hand and leading her indoors, and ushering her and Carry into a small but comfortably furnished apartment.

On being seated, Florence related to Mr. Dupre and his aunt all that had happened since her father's death.

"Then you are endeavouring to reach the British army."

"Yes, sir; that is our intention."

"Why, my dear madam," said Mons. Dupre, "you have indeed entered into a path of danger. First of all, the British army is many leagues away from here; and it would be utterly impossible for you ever to reach it. A thousand dangers are before you. On foot, through a terrible country, and without a protector, you would perish in the attempt."

"But you forget," said Florence, smiling; "we are not without a protector," and she stroked the shaggy head of Victor, who was basking in the warmth diffused by the ruddy fire.

"True, I had indeed forgotten your faithful dumb friend. Yet, staunch and brave though he may prove, he cannot escort you through all the dangers that would beset you."

"What can we do then? Pray tell us how to act, for I am determined to reach the English army, even if it cost me my life," exclaimed Florence, with fervour and energy.

Dupre looked at the frail form before him, and a feeling of admiration stole over him as he beheld the noble and courageous bearing, in one otherwise so gentle and so timid.

"Yes," he said, "I will help you all I can. You must, it is true, leave here, for danger hovers over you even now. If it should transpire that a native of England is harboured here, it might cost us all our lives."

"Oh! is it so? then indeed we must be going," exclaimed Florence, rising from her seat, pale, yet firm.

"Nay," said Dupre, "it would be madness to go forth now; what I meant to infer was, that there was danger here, that needed energy and firmness to combat, as well as that you would encounter in your perilous pilgrimage. God forbid that I should harbour a selfish thought, when the daughter of my benefactor is in danger."

"Now, my dear," said the aunt, who, all bustle and smiles, after a brief absence, now returned. "You must need rest, I'm sure; you look quite jaded and worn out. I've prepared your room, and if you have no objection, I will show you to it at once."

Florence and Carry, with grateful looks, expressed their willingness and pleasure to accept at once the good lady's offer; and, with many utterances of gratitude to Monsieur Dupre, they took leave of him for the night.

Victor's formidable appearance, together with his

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determined manner in following his mistress, caused his effrontry to be overlooked. So he, too, retired to rest and to guard.

CHAPTER LXI.

HERBERT MANDEVILLE AND THE MARQUIS OF BRIDGNORTH. —THE VOYAGE—THE CAT-O'-NINE TAILS—DEATH OF BLUSTERING BILL.

"WHAT, Herbert my lad, still down in the mouth, hey?" said a gay ringing voice, accompanied with a slap administered on the shoulder of the person addressed.

"Oh! Frank, is it you?" replied Herbert Mandeville, turning round and faintly smiling on the young officer who had spoken to him.

"Yes, it's myself sure, as the Irishman would say; but come, what's in the wind? why you are certainly not yourself."

"Perhaps, not."

"I am sure you are not."

"I suppose it's the voyage which disagrees with me."

"Fiddlesticks," said the young man, with a toss of his head, and swinging round on one heel. "Excuse me, dear Herbert, if I'm too plain spoken; but I think you are out of sorts with something or other."

"Well, well, you are not far wrong."

"I thought not. You've got the blue devils."

Herbert resumed his walk on the deck of the transport, accompanied by the Honourable Capel Fawcett, the young officer who had just been conversing with him.

There was a singular difference between these two men, though both so young.

Both possessed a strongly marked character, though totally opposite in quality and degree.

Herbert, gloomy and melancholy, though at times cheerful, afforded a marked contrast to Capel, who was all light and sunshine, gaiety and mirth.

Nothing that ever occurred could throw a damper on his spirits.

"But, Herbert, have you seen our new captain?"

"No."

"You've not?"

"Then you should."

"Why?"

"Because I think you'll see yourself."

"What do you mean, Capel?"

"I mean that there's a young fellow come on board now that goes musing about like some one else I know."

Herbert looked at Capel.

"Oh, I don't say it's you; oh, no."

"Well, and who is this new comer?" inquired Herbert.

"Who is he? Oh, that's easier asked than answered. All I know is that he came on board in a devil of a hurry just before we started from the Tower Stairs, and joined our mess."

"Our mess!"

"Yes. He's in our corps; and, what with him and you moping and sighing about, I think we shall be called the Royal Blues."

"Ah! Capel, I'd give something to be as light-hearted as you; but there, it's no use repining. If you knew all I am sure you would sympathise with me and my misfortunes."

"Sympathise!" echoed Capel, "I would do more than that, Herbert, if it were within human possibility. I would help to relieve or soften thy misfortune."

A pressure of the hand eloquently, yet silently, hanked the generous-hearted speaker.

"Ah! here comes our new knight of the rueful countenance," said Capel, laughing.

Herbert turned round, and beheld the finely-developed figure of a tall and handsome man.

"He seems a noble looking fellow," said Herbert.

"Yes, I've no doubt he's a good sort of fellow, if he could only leave that rueful countenance off."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Herbert. "He is evidently suffering from some hidden sorrow."

Some strange attraction appeared to surround the stranger, for, as he came nearer, Herbert felt a yearning akin to friendship rising in his heart.

At that moment a tremendous yell burst from some voice before the mast.

It was the agonising cry of some poor wretch beneath the infliction of the lash.

Several men had been impressed into the service, and, heedless of their cries for mercy, their captors had torn them from home and kindred, without giving them the chance of even leaving word what had become of them.

And now that the ship had lost sight of land, the poor devils were goaded almost to madness.

Those who would not go to work in a willing manner were subjected to brutal insults and torture; and if such should be resented, woe betide the unlucky pressed man.

All was bustle and excitement on board the transport.

Soldiers, sailors, and marines crowded the deck and the rigging, and few were they who looked on in pity.

The culprit or wretch about to undergo the fearful torture of the cat was none other than Blustering Bill, who, in an unlucky moment for himself, though fortunate for society, contrived to run foul of the press gang.

This obstinate and brutal native could not brook the rough treatment he met with at their hands, and, consequently, he had avenged all the insults he had received in one downright blow on the nose of the boatswain's mate, knocking him down the hatchway, and breaking his leg.

There was no worse crime on board a ship than striking your superior officer, and severe, and even cruel, were the punishments meted out to such offenders.

But Blustering Bill's dander was up.

He fought and struggled, and kicked and swore, when they seized and bound him.

And it was with the greatest difficulty that the crew managed to secure him against doing further mischief.

There was no court-martial.

It was enough to know that the offence had been committed.

Enough to know that punishment could and would be awarded.

"Lash him to the grating."

In an instant he was stretched out and firmly tied, his shirt torn from his back, revealing the broad and brawny muscles of the ex-burglar.

"Are you ready?"

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the boatswain, whose bared arms showed the muscle and strength that lay there, together with the will to strike.

Opposite the boatswain was a seaman, equally prepared, with cat in hand, ready to relieve the boatswain when his arm lacked in vigour and strength.

"Lay on!" was the order.

Down came the terrible thongs.

A dull, heavy sound was heard as the blow struck into the flesh.

The blood flew into the faces of the bystanders off the rising cat.

Another blow.

Blustering Bill uttered a terrible and blasphemous

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oath, and compressing his lips, almost bit his tongue through in the effort to subdue the expression of agony that rose to his lips.

Again and again the lash descended. The victim's back was unrecognizable as human flesh. Blood and flesh strewed the deck.

"Horrible, horrible!" murmured Herbert Mandeville, who, disgusted though he was with the exhibition, still seemed fascinated, as it were, with the scene.

The boatswain ceased. But not so with the flogging. Without a moment's cessation, it was taken up by the other man; and whack! whack! fell the blows, harder and faster than ever.

Blustering Bill could endure it no longer. With a fearful cry, he roared out for mercy; he raged, he swore, he bellowed, but to no purpose.

The blows still rain upon his back.

His cries have ceased, and groans of agony alone escape him.

His head droops forward, and he knows no more—he has fainted.

"Bring him to," was the stern command.

The doctor, who was present during the infliction of the punishment, was now busily engaged in endeavouring to restore Blustering Bill to animation, and shortly after Bill opened his eyes.

"How now, doctor; can he take the rest?" asked the officer in command.

"Oh, yes! there's plenty of life in him yet," was the cool reply.

"Boatswain, do your duty."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Once more the accursed cat-o'-nine-tails mangles the pulpy and bruised mass of blood and flesh on poor Bill's back. Stolidly, almost stupidly, he receives it. To see him now, one would believe that he had lost all sensation.

Five hundred lashes was the number.

The boatswain rested from his labour. The number was told.

Like a drunken man, the victim staggered forward, when released, and would have fallen if he had not been caught by a sailor standing near.

Pushing the sailor away, with a superhuman effort he drew himself up to his full height; then nerving himself, he turned full round to where the officer who had commanded his punishment was still standing. With a cry like a fiend, Blustering Bill dashed towards him, and ere he could be stopped, had seized him by the throat.

An extraordinary scene followed this daring act.

The men stood a moment all agape with astonishment; for the surprising agility and strength displayed after so severe a prostration the moment before, was what had never yet occurred in their experience.

But the critical position of their commander at once restored them to action.

Already the officer's face grew black, his tongue protruded, and his eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets.

The grip of Blustering Bill was terrible, and the more so as revenge and pain nerved him to extraordinary strength.

The crew of the transport seized hold of the maddened and excited man, and endeavoured to haul him off, but their hands slipped from their hold, and the blood and bruised flesh clung to each finger-nail.

Wildly in the air the nearly choked officer tossed his arms.

Slowly he sinks backwards; another moment and all sense will have left him.

The excitement was intense on board.

"He will be murdered!" was the exclamation of all.

And at last, from the sheer weight of numbers, Blustering Bill was torn from his prey.

The officer sank to the deck, exhausted and all but insensible.

"Off, hell dogs! off, I say!" shouted Bill, struggling and writhing with the men who had seized hold of him.

"Steady, my lad," said an old salt. "Don't go for to make such a palaver. You're a little light-headed, that is all. You'd better come down below and have a quieter."

"Off, I say!" again shouted Bill, bursting into a volley of oaths and blasphemy.

The officer now rallied, and soon stood on his legs again.

But a fearful paleness overspread his countenance, and he eyed Blustering Bill still struggling with anything but composure.

The moment Blustering Bill saw him, he gave vent to a fearful imprecation, and screamed out at the top of his voice,—

"Not dead! not dead! Ten thousand curses; but I'll have your life yet. Blast ye, why do you hold me back. Away, I say!—I will have his accursed life."

With a wild cry he succeeded in flinging off those who held him, and bounding forward, would again have fallen on the unfortunate officer who had excited his wrath, but at the moment he reached within a pace of the object of his revenge, uttering a fearful oath at the time, he came to a sudden pause—he lifted his hands to his head, a stream of blood gushed from his mouth and nostrils, and, without a groan or cry, he fell forward on his face a corpse.

Blustering Bill was dead.

With blasphemy on his lips, and murder in his heart, he had been summoned peremptorily and suddenly to answer for his wickedness, at that awful tribunal where all, sooner or later, must appear.

Horrified and startled at the presence of death in so menacing a manner, the sailors stood aghast, until awakened to their duty by the shrill call of the boatswain's whistle.

"Now, my lads, bear a hand with this 'ere poor carcase; we'll give him a sailor's burial, anyhow, not that I think he's desarving of such distinctions; only, you see," added the boatswain, in an undertone, "it's all along of that cursed cat; what the devil is the good of it? It only makes fiends and devils of men, instead of making better sailors of them. For my part, I wish I had nothing to do with such jobs—but, you see, duty must be attended to."

"Oh, all right, Jem, but you needn't lay it on so stiff when ye does it."

"Yes, Jem's hand is not quite so light as a lady's paw—is it, mate?"

"I should think not."

They raised the body and carried it below, till they were prepared to consign it to a watery grave.

"Ah!" said the surgeon of the ship, "that's the effect of strong and unbridled passions. He has bursted a blood vessel in his heart, caused from over-excitement, appertaining to an exhausted frame."

And so Bill was placed in a hammock, and at nightfall quietly dropped into the ocean, a shot slung in the hammock carrying him below the surface.

No burial service was read over him, and the waves alone murmured a requiem for the departed and sinful soul.

"Is it possible that we belong to a Christian country, the most enlightened nation on the earth, and yet scenes occur, and deeds are performed that fill us with horror?" said Herbert Mandeville to his companion Capel.

"It seems not only possible, but real," replied Capel. "Upon my word, I feel almost inclined to be dull and sad, to think that we live in such a vile and villaneous age."

The Marquis of Bridgworth was standing within

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hearing, while Herbert and Capel were engaged in conversation, he having joined the crowd, which had accumulated to view the punishment of the cat-o'-nine tails; and by degrees had been jostled and pushed until he stood, as we just stated, close to Herbert Mandeville and Capel.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said the Marquis, at being an involuntary listener, but I perceive you are filled with the same disgust as I am, at the terrible scene we have just witnessed."

"Disgust!" replied Herbert, "is too mild a term for the abhorrence we feel at the brutal and degrading infliction of the lash."

"It is a sad mistake, I think," said the Marquis, "to imagine that men, endowed with the faculty of reason, can be cowed and governed as senseless brutes."

"It is indeed," said Herbert, sighing.

As if by mutual consent, they suffered the subject to drop, and all seemed absorbed in their own reflections.

The sea was slightly disturbed—a breeze, what sailors would call a cap-full, caused the face of the water to undulate in troubled waves. The transport dipped heavily, and in spite of the wind, her progress was wretchedly slow. Somehow, government always delighted in selecting the worst instrument to work out their ends, and the worst ships to carry them.

It was so in this instance, as it ever was.

The sun went down in threatening mood, and the wind as the darkness increased, swelled in volume and strength.

They were now sailing in the famous Bay of Biscay, and the traditional roughness of that locality gave further confirmation to those who hitherto had pinned their faith to the belief. It was rough sure enough now.

After watching the crests of the waves rolling one over the other in boisterous play, Herbert ventured to speak——

"You, I presume, but recently joined our corps."

"Yes, the day we sailed."

"In search of active service."

"Yes."

"Ah, death and glory," said Herbert, with a sigh, and again relapsing into gloomy thought. "'Tis all that is left to hope for."

"You speak as if you, too, desired to finish your career less on the account of glory than of death."

"Yes, sir, I have been unfortunate, and young as I am, I have no care to live."

"Alas, how strange, that two beings, bent on the same dark resolve, should, by some strange and unaccountable destiny, be thrown together thus."

"Yes, and from similar causes—that of sorrow; for, if I mistake not, the impress of grief has been stamped on your heart."

"Look, Herbert," cried out Capel, who had been intently watching something in the distance, and quite heedless or unconscious that Herbert was engaged in converse with the mopish young gentleman he had spoken of previously.

"What is it?" said Herbert.

"Can you not see?"

"No, I do not see anything."

"Nothing?"

"Only the sea and the black sky."

"There—now."

"I still see nothing."

"Well, you must be as blind as an owl."

"But I thought owls could see in the dark?"

"Ah!—so they can."

"Then I'm not like an owl."

"No, no," impatiently said Capel. "But don't you see a light yonder?"

Herbert looked in the direction that Capel indicated.

He strained his eyes, but to no purpose.

He could discover nothing that in any way resembled a light.

"It's no use, Capel, I cannot see anything like a light, except the sparkle of the white foam of the waves."

"You cannot be looking in the right direction," said Capel, who was determined to convince Herbert somehow that he had not been mistaken in what he had stated he saw.

"Now stand hard!"

"Yes."

"A little more to the right. That's it."

Herbert resigned himself to the position assigned him with a half-incredulous smile.

"I'm afraid I could see the light you describe that you saw in your own eyes, Capel. That wicked light, you know—easier than that over the ocean."

"Well, you positively will drive me mad with your incredulity."

At that moment a lurid glare burst on their view.

"There," said Capel, in tones of joyous triumph. "What do you think now?"

That you were right, Capel, after all," replied Herbert, good humouredly.

Larger and brighter grew the light. It was at the verge of the horizon.

All on board now hurried to the side of the vessel, gazing in mute astonishment on the lurid light that reddened the sea and the sky beyond, but so distant that no shape or idea could be formed of it.

"Its a roarer-borer list," said an old sailor, with knowing knock on the top of his tarpaulin, "that's what it is; I'd know that, I'm thinking, after cruising among the icebergs in the north so long."

"Go along, Jack, you're wrong; it's no sich thing; why look how it's gradually getting bigger and bigger, and so steady like."

"Well, what o' that?"

"What of that!" why it's not like one that I saw in the whaling seas."

"No, no," said another tar, turning a quid in his mouth. "That's a ship on fire, mate."

"A ship on fire!"

"Yes."

"A ship on fire!" ran electric-like from mouth to mouth.

A feeling of fear creeped over all, as they gazed spell-bound.

It is something awful to contemplate when some thousands of miles from land, and in a little floating prison, tossed at the mercy of the waves.

"A ship on fire."

What harrowing scenes ran before the mental vision at those awful words.

The agony and despair. The fierce and relentless flames on the one hand, and the cool and mocking waves on the other.

Or should these two terrors be evaded, perhaps a third and worse one will follow—that of starvation and thirst.

All who gazed felt convinced that the old sailor was right, and that it was indeed a ship on fire.

It was so distant, however, that even with a glass nothing but the reflection of the fire could be seen.

The ship was still below the horizon she was assisting to illuminate so grandly.

Presently a column of fire shot high up into the heavens.

"There goes her magazine," said the sailor who had first explained what it was. "By that 'ere reckoning, I should say she were a man-o'-war."

"God help the poor critters on board of her!" said another.

All was now dark.

The ocean roared and seathed as if nothing had occurred to disturb its course or bosom.

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Yet, perhaps, hundreds of poor wretches were now struggling for life amid its treacherous depths.

"Shall we come up to where she disappeared?" said Capel to the first old sailor; "perhaps we might pick up some of the crew who might have taken to the boats."

"Well, seeing that she disappeared there," said the old sailor, pointing towards the stern, "and we are going in that direction," pointing towards the bows, "I see no chance, unless we go round the world and come up towards their starn; but then, that couldn't happen next week."

"But could we not put back?"

"Put back!" exclaimed the old man with a look of astonishment. "Why, it's impossible, with this 'ere wind blowing as it does now. No, no; there's plenty to pick 'em up in that direction—they'll be all right."

"God grant your words may prove true," said Herbert, with fervour.

"Amen," murmured the old tar.

The night was now pitchy dark, and the wind blew in gusts, driving the spray in the faces of those whom duty placed on deck.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE SMUGGLER'S SHIP.—SIR MILES CRESSINGHAM.—A SCRIMMAGE.

Some hours of the night had passed away, the ship rolling and pitching heavily, and the sea making clean breaches over her the while, to the great discomfort of all on board.

It was in the middle watch. The men had wrapped themselves in their pilot jackets, and with occasional grunts of discontent at the cold and wet they were enduring, walked up and down the deck.

"Starboard, ahoy!" shouted a voice, apparently proceeding from the darkness of the sea, on the lee quarter.

"Who the devil are you?" the officer of the watch called back.

"Where away, or we shall run you down."

At that moment they could perceive the dark outline of a vessel just looming through the darkness.

The danger of a collision was imminent indeed.

"Helm a-starboard!" shouted the officer of the watch, to the man of the wheel, of the transport.

Labouringly the old vessel endeavoured to obey her helm.

But it was too late.

Ere the head of the transport had turned to the desired direction, the strang vessel was upon them.

A shock, that hurled everything out of its place followed. The crash sent the fore topmast over; but the rigging and ropes held the broken spars to the masts.

The ship lurched over, and the waves now swept completely over her, and the water poured in at the scuppers.

It was a moment of extreme peril.

"Cut away the rigging!" shouted the officer.

Immediately the crew responded, and hatchets and knives went to work with a will, for their lives depended on the result.

After a moment of intense suspense, the fore-top mast fell overboard, clear of the ship, which instantly righted.

The crew and officers who were below had been startled out of their sleep by the shock of the collision, and now came running on deck in a state of alarm.

The crew, after clearing away the wreck, now gave full vent to their indignation, in loud imprecations on the lubbers who had run them down.

But the darkness was so intense that they could no longer discern the unwelcome vessel, which had caused so much mischief.

The commander of the transport was very wrath, and viewed the damage done to his vessel in anything but an amiable light.

"Sling the night lanterns up," he shouted to the crew. "If they had been hung out before this would not have happened."

The order was silently obeyed.

In a little while they again descry the dark outline of the vessel that had proved so unfortunate to them.

"There she is!" shouted a dozen voices.

"Ship ahoy!" shouted the commander of the transport, through his speaking trumpet.

"Aye, aye!" was the response.

"What the devil are you up to, running down His Majesty's ships in this way?" yelled the commander of the transport.

"Why don't you stand clear then, and be damned to you!" was the unpolite reply of the strange vessel.

Lieutenant Johnson turned red with rage at this answer, and he was upon the point of ordering his men to pour a broadside into the saucy stranger, when prudence came to his aid, and suggested that they might, perhaps, be too strong for him.

"What's your name, and where are you bound to?" again cried Lieutenant Johnson, swallowing his indignation.

"We don't feel bound to answer, unless you tell us what you are first."

"Damnation!" muttered the lieutenant. "But they shall pay for this insolence."

Then, as if seized with a better resolution, he again put the speaking trumpet to his lips, and called out—

"This is His Majesty's ship *Warhawk*, bound for Gibraltar."

"Oh, well, ours is the *Devil's Own*, and be damned to you."

A roar of laughter followed this reply of the strange skipper.

This was too much for Lieutenant Johnson.

Though ignorant of the strength of his adversary, he determined to have a slap at him for his insolence and daring answer.

"Clear for action," he shouted, in an excited and enraged tone of voice.

"Aye! aye! sir."

All was bustle and excitement now on board. The soldiers had ascended to the deck, regardless of the warning of the sailors to keep out of harm's way.

They wanted to see the scrimmage.

In a few moments all were ready.

"Now!" said the lieutenant.

"But, sir," said the gunner's mate, touching his hat, "the enemy is not in sight, now."

"So much the better, then," said the lieutenant, coolly; and, thrusting his hands into his pockets, prepared to turn into his cabin again. Yes, again he succumbed to reflection, and thought it fortunate that he had got out of what might have proved a misfortune, so easily.

He had scarcely, however, gone a dozen paces, when the aggravating ship again appeared.

"There she is again."

"Give it her, then," said the officer of the watch.

"Aye, aye, sir! Here goes!"

The guns on the larboard quarter were instantly run out, the burning tow applied, and the next instant a flash of fire ran along the whole length of the ship's port-holes. A roar like thunder followed. The recoil of the charge caused the ship to heel over, and the lieutenant, not being prepared for so sudden an event, lost his balance, and pitched forward on his face, his posteriors exposed to the full glare of one of the ship's lantern.

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FRED CREATOREX AMIDST THE DERVISHES.

He soon recovered himself, however, and in a towering rage, rushed forward to know the reason of so sudden an explosion of artillery.

"How dared you fire without orders?"

The men slunk off, leaving Mr. Small, the officer who had had the command of the watch, standing alone before his commander.

"I did, sir."

"Then how dare you——?"

"The ship hove in sight, sir."

"Damn the ship! What's that to do with my orders?"

Mr. Small looked small, indeed. He turned red, partly with anger, at the uncivil way in which he was addressed, and partly from shame at the figure he was cutting before his brother officers.

"I thought it was your intention to attack the vessel the moment we sighted her."

"You thought! What business have you to think? There, go to your cabin, sir. You are under arrest."

All this had scarcely occupied a moment; in fact, the smoke from the broadside had not yet had time to clear away.

As Mr. Small retired, a burst of artillery from the strange ship sent a shower of missiles into the transport, tearing away part of the bulwarks, and knocking down several of the crew.

The foolishness of Lieutenant Johnson was now

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apparent. He had scared away all the men from the guns, and ere they could be got to their places again, another broadside was poured into them from the stranger.

"Curse them!" muttered Lieutenant Johnson. "They're too much for us, I do believe."

The men stood ready.

They took good heed this time that they would not fire till the lieutenant himself gave the order.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir!" cried several voices.

For a moment the lieutenant stood irresolute; then, with a half-suppressed sigh, as if he feared the result, he raised his hand,—

"Fire!"

Every gun on the larboard bow disgorged its contents simultaneously with the command, for anxious eyes watched as well as ears, and the order and discharge were wonderfully close.

It was impossible to conjecture whether their broadside had taken effect, for the noise of the bellowing guns drowned all other sounds; but, nevertheless, the crew of the transport were sanguine enough to believe that their low aim must have carried the shots well home.

Just as they were ready to serve out another broadside, the stranger vessel gave them the whole weight of her starboard broadside, which, for a moment staggered those on board the transport.

But their mettle was up, and like true Englishmen, they stripped to with undaunted courage and obstinacy.

The sight of the blood of their wounded comrades now dyeing the deck roused all the slumbering fierceness within them; and, with a defiant cheer, they ran their guns forward again, and once more the roar and flash follows.

Again they stand ready, and eager for the word of command to fire.

But the assembled officers are bewildered; they can see nothing in the intense darkness that prevails. What if they are wasting shot and powder on the empty air. The thought was galling.

Some minutes had elapsed, and yet no return had been made by the stranger vessel to the last broadside of the transport.

Could they have escaped? or, better still, had the transport succeeded in sinking her?

They had not long to wait in doubt.

A flash—a roar—and again they receive the fatal messengers from the strange ship.

The iron shower tears up the deck, and hurls the splinters and fragments in all directions.

Amazed and enraged, the unfortunate crew of the transport believe at first that they are surrounded, for the last discharge had fallen on the starboard quarter.

If it was one vessel, then she must have tacked, and so got on the other quarter.

"Mr. Johnson," said Herbert Mandeville, now walking up to the lieutenant; "you are evidently acting without proper caution."

"Sir, are you speaking to me?"

"Yes, I addressed myself to you, sir."

"Then you will please to mind your own business," said the lieutenant, in a cool and insolent tone.

"I repeat," said Herbert, "that the way in which you are managing this vessel, endangers the safety of all on board."

"How dare you, sir, question my conduct on board this ship?"

"Because," said Herbert, "I perceive that a madman or a fool commands it; and I am resolved that I will not suffer my life to be risked by the imbecility of such a person."

"Damnation, sir; do you know that I'm captain here? And by hell, you shall not beard me thus."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Herbert.

"Here!" shouted the lieutenant, now beside himself with rage, "sieze hold of this mutinous rascal; I'll teach him to brave me thus."

Some of the marines stepped forward, and were about to lay hold of Herbert Mandeville, when the Marquis of Bridgnorth threw himself before him.

"Stand back!" he cried, his handsome face flushing with excitement and indignation; "stand back, I say! or, by heavens, you shall repent it. And as for you," he continued, turning towards the lieutenant, "you shall answer for this outrageous and insulting conduct to an officer and a gentleman."

"Why do you stand gaping like idiots?" cried the lieutenant, foaming with passion. "Sieze him, sieze them both!—d'ye hear?"

The marines again advanced.

They dared not disobey orders.

Yet, they were loth to perform the duty that devolved upon them.

All this time the attention of the crew had been diverted from the strange vessel to the more engrossing scene enacting on board their own ship, and as they did not return the last broadside, their enemy evidently believed them silenced, consequently, no further firing took place.

The faintest streak of light now shone in the east—the intense darkness was about to succumb to the approach of day—and, faint as was the light, it just enabled those on board to discern each other.

An uproar beyond description existed on board the transport.

The soldiers were all assembled, and with this as their incentive, looked black and threatening on the concourse of sailors and marines who were about to place their two officers under arrest.

"Mr. Johnson," shouted Herbert, "you are a coward to rely thus upon your men and your position. I demand satisfaction for the insult you have dared to cast upon me."

"And I too," said the Marquis, sternly.

"You shall have such satisfaction as the hold of a ship can give you," replied the lieutenant, with a mocking laugh.

Then, resuming his fierceness of demeanour, he waved his hand,—

"Sieze them! and if they resist, load them with chains."

"Dare to lay a hand upon me," shouted Herbert, as he sprang aside, and, drawing his sword, stood on the defensive, "and I will strike thee dead."

The marines again paused.

The Marquis of Bridgnorth followed Herbert's example, and he, too, stood on the defensive.

Once more, urged by the menaces and oaths of the lieutenant, the marines advanced.

It was the signal for revolt.

With a cry of defiance, the soldiers rushed forward, and a hideous *melée* followed.

The marines fixed bayonets and charged.

Many of the soldiers were badly hurt.

Herbert and the Marquis were borne away in the rush, and separated from their intended captors.

The sight of their wounded comrades acted on the inflamed passions of the soldiers like oil on fire.

A shout of rage and vengeance burst from their throats, and many of them rushed below to procure their arms.

As these returned, bearing as many weapons as

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they could carry, the others quickly seized them, and passed them on to their comrades.

Thus armed, they now presented a fearful obstacle to the further advance of the marines.

The sailors held aloof.

They did not mingle in the affray, for, to tell the truth, there was no great love existing between them and that cross between sailor and soldier—a marine.

Added to which they pretty generally disliked their captain.

His overbearing manners and pusilanimity had disgusted them.

So they looked on.

The hostile parties for a moment ceased in their stormy career.

It was the calm before the storm.

Like beasts of prey they glared on each other, watching for a favourable point or opportunity that they might take advantage of.

"Shoot them down!" shouted the lieutenant. "Death to the mutineers!"

Herbert now came forward, having with some difficulty extricated himself from the crowd of soldiers that sought good-naturedly to shield him from the unjust attack of the lieutenant.

"Soldiers, I command you to desist!"

A sullen silence was the only response.

"Do you hear me? To your duty instantly—Retire!"

Still the men remained passive and silent.

"Arrest the ringleader!" interrupted Lieutenant Johnson, the moment he saw Herbert Mandoville in front of the troops again; and pointing his finger at him, shouted out,—"Arrest him! seize him!"

All Herbert's endeavours to secure peace and order were at once frustrated.

Blind with fury, the soldiers dashed forward as the marines, in obedience to their commands, advanced.

Execrations, yells, and groans, mingle in horrid discord.

Blood flows in little rills on the deck, and for a time the transport ship becomes a floating hell.

CHAPTER LXIII.

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER AND A STRANGE STORY.

TOM STARLING rapidly advanced towards convalescence.

Yet he was not happy.

To his free and roving spirit imprisonment was as gall and wormwood.

He yearned to be free.

After the destructive fire that had annihilated the French frigate, he was transferred to other hands.

The crew that were picked up from the boats were drafted to the different vessels composing the French fleet, while the officers were passed on to a vessel returning to France, that they might officially acquit themselves of blame as regards the loss of their ship.

Accordingly, Tom, being the only prisoner, was sent on board one of the sloops, where other prisoners that had fallen into the power of the French on other occasions were placed.

Tom's heart sunk within him.

All prospect of escape seemed passing away.

He had been thus gloomy and melancholy, thinking over the past, and dwelling on the present and future, when a voice in his native tongue aroused him from his reverie.

He turned round, half surprised to hear an English voice.

"You are a prisoner, I suppose, like myself?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I'm in limbo with these cursed mounseers."

"Alas! when shall we behold the green fields of dear old England again?"

"Well, I don't so much care about the green fields if I could clap eyes on an English sail, and stand on an English plank. The green sea is a field that gladdens my heart always."

"Is not your name Starling?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, that's my name, sure enough; Tom Starling, at your service," said Tom, with an air of pride.

"Then, surely you know me?"

Tom scanned his companion with an air of curiosity, but he could make nothing of him.

He was a young man, partly attired in a sailor's dress, tall, slim, and delicate in appearance.

Yet, a healthy brown on his countenance gave him an appearance of strength that he really did not possess.

That was the result of travel and exposure to the sun of warmer climes.

"No! I can't make you out."

"Do you not remember Fred Greatorex, whose life you saved from drowning about two years ago!"

"Fred Greatorex!" echoed Tom.

"Yes."

"Well, you bring me up standing. Give us your fin, old boy!" With a smile of pleasure the young man held out his hand, and Tom seized it in his iron grip and gave it a shake, that almost made Fred Greatorex believe he must be a pump, and his arm the handle.

"Well, I am glad to see you," said Tom, giving the pump handle another tug.

"Indeed you cannot feel more pleasure than I do, at once more beholding the generous preserver of my life."

"Oh, tush, about that. Why you would have done the same for me."

"I'm afraid not," said Fred, shaking his head. "I would indeed gladly risk my life for you, but I doubt my capabilities in doing that which you did for me."

The young man alluded to an incident that had occurred two years before, when, for the sake of his health, he had been ordered by his medical adviser to travel abroad, and, as passenger, had sailed in the same ship that Tom Starling had secured a berth in. It was during a squall, that the enthusiastic young man had, contrary to orders, remained on deck; a sudden lurch of the vessel had sent him overboard.

Without a moment's hesitation, Tom Starling had plunged into the boiling wave, and, after a severe struggle, succeeded in rescuing the half drowned Fred.

"But how came you to be a prisoner?" said Tom.

"Alas, I have passed through many dangers since I saw you last. But it's a long story, and I think I had better begin at the beginning, and tell you all that has happened to me. That is," he added, "if you are disposed to hear it."

"Spin it out, old boy, I'm all attention."

"On the sixth of September I went on board the good ship *Calibran*, sailing under the English flag, and which was to clear out that same evening for California. Having exchanged a few words with the captain, I felt to a certain extent restored to confidence, finding him full of generous and manly frankness.

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"He was a man of some forty years of age, tall, and with a face expressive of energy. He was a thorough sailor, and I saw immediately that he did not lack for courage or goodness of heart.

"My first care was to visit my cabin, and stow away my luggage. Soon afterwards we were under weigh.

"A vague feeling of oppression settled over me, as we stood out to sea, which I scarcely could explain, considering that I was about to return to my home and kindred. Somehow, it seemed to me as if it presaged misfortune, and, wishing to shake it off, I went on deck, and busied myself by inspecting the ship.

"She was a fine barque, of eight hundred tons burthen, clean rigged, and graceful in form. There was a poop aft, the inside of which was used as a dining room, and on each side opened the passengers' berths. At the aftermost end were two state rooms; one was used by the captain; and the other by the supercargo, who represented a firm in London. The fittings were blue and gold, and the general neatness and order that prevailed implanted a sense of security and comfort gratifying to feel with a three months' voyage in store.

"There was another passenger, a Chinese, from Canton, about fifty years of age. He had a house of business at San Francisco, where we intended to call, and was carrying with him a stock of opium, sugar, and coffee. Fou Chou, such was his name, had the characteristic common to his countrymen, and, moreover, was strongly pitted with the small pox. His ugliness, however, had nothing repulsive in it, for a kind smile was over on his lips.

"At my first dinner on board, we sat down to table, four persons of different nationalities; the captain was Scotch, the supercargo American, Fou Chou, Chinese, and myself English. I dwell upon this, so that you may form an idea of the difficulties likely to arise from this diversity of language in the case of a common danger threatening us. Fou Chou spoke English tolerably well, and that fact, coupled with his ability to speak Chinese, proved ultimately of incalculable service to us all, as you will presently see.

"Our crew consisted of seventeen men.

"The day after our departure, I was suddenly aroused from my sleep. There was a great commotion on deck, a hurrying to and fro of many feet.

"Feeling alarmed, I hastily dressed myself and left the cabin.

"The ship was lying to; a sailor had fallen overboard.

"His head could just be seen rising and falling with the waves, but luckily he was a stout swimmer, and having put the helm up in time, in about fifteen minutes he was got on board.

"Although this incident was not followed by any untoward circumstance, it disheartened me greatly. I looked upon it as a bad beginning to our voyage.

"I returned thoughtfully to my cabin; and, after some time spent in reverie, partook of breakfast.

"The breeze was slight, and very little progress was made during the day; the land still hugged us on our quarter.

"Towards evening the barometer went down in a most alarming manner; the wind suddenly rose, and the sea ran high.

"The captain, forseeing a storm, shortened sail.

"To judge from appearances, it was not too early; for we were about to contend with the typhoon. The typhoon! That scourge of the Indian and Chinese seas—a wind equally disastrous by land and water, bearing death and desolation in its track.

"At length it burst upon us in all its fury.

"The *Calibran*, heaving and straining amidst the waves, threatened each moment to go down. Hardly two hours had elapsed when the main and mizen masts went by the board, entangling our decks with the fallen rigging.

"Two of our boats broke from their lashings, and were carried away.

"There was already two feet of water in the hold, and as sea after sea struck the ship, the waves went surging along the deck, inundating the poop cabin, and breaking down all before them.

"All this while the captain stuck to his post—his wet hair clinging to his face, and his garments hanging to him like silk.

"Everything was overthrown, and heaped pell mell in all directions.

"Suddenly a fearful crash resounded.

"For a moment I hid my face in my hands, expecting every moment to see the planks open and bury me in the ocean depths.

"The crash had been caused by the fall of the mizenmast on the deck, by which one poor fellow was badly hurt.

"After fourteen hours, passed thus, daylight broke upon our wretchedness. The tempest gradually moderated, and towards noon died entirely away; and though the sea still continued agitated, it appeared as nothing compared to what we had just gone through.

"At dinner I went into the dining-room. Nothing remained but heaps of broken crockery and furniture strewn about the floor in pools of water.

"I then went on deck, and could scarcely move along for the various broken objects lying in all directions: rope, chains, hen-coops, spars, sail-cloth, without counting the wrecks of the three masts.

"The sea had been so lashed by the fury of the tempest that it had become yellow with the sands of its bed. The clouds were lowering, and the horizon, circumscribed in extent, showed but a narrow streak of grey light.

"As we had not yet lost sight of land, the captain with difficulty got up a jurymast, and wore the ship for Hong Kong, the vessel requiring at least six weeks' refitting. As it became calm so did we become hungry, and the appetite, neglected during our danger, now asserted its rights, refusing to be longer ignored. Not a word was spoken at the table, everyone being too intent in administering to the cravings of the stomach to waste time in idle words.

"That evening the captain ordered all except the crew to retire early.

"It might have been about midnight, when, under the influence of a horrible nightmare, I seemed to hear the awful shrieks of demons.

"The shouts increasing, and becoming more palpable, awoke me from sleep; and, on opening my eyes, they were dazzled by a bright red light, that illumined the cabin.

"Startled, and for a moment terrified, and believing the ship to be on fire, I sprang from my bed and hastened to the door.

"The captain and the supercargo were on the thresholds of their cabin.

"We looked vacantly at each other, without the power of speech.

"Savage yells and heavy blows on the ship's sides created an uproar frightful in itself. Large stones and pieces of iron were hurled through the skylights; and the glare of the flame struck us dumb with terror.

"With difficulty I strove to speak, and at last I seized the captain by the arm.

"'Captain, captain, is the ship on fire?' I cried 'Speak, do you not hear me?'

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"But he remained like one petrified, replying in an unconscious tone,—

"'I don't know, I don't know."

"Suddenly he broke away, and returned with a revolver in his hand.

"At this moment the second mate rushed in, and approaching the captain, whispered a few words, which I could not hear.

"As quick as thought, and suspecting something terrible, I went back to my cabin, from the port-hole of which I saw that we were surrounded by numerous Chinese junks.

"Horrified at the sight, I rushed on deck, crying out,—

"'The pirates! the pirates!'

"It was indeed the pirates—those scourges of the Chinese seas, so dreaded for their cruelties.

"We were in their power!

"Four junks, each manned by forty or fifty men, surrounded us.

"Then we had been saved from the storm only to encounter a worse fate, and our disabled state afforded the brigands an easy prey.

"Having cast their grappling irons on the *Calibran*, they clambered to her deck with the agility of monkeys. Once there, they commenced a demoniacal kind of dance, shouting forth the most fearful sounds conceivable.

"The light that had terrified us, and which we thought was caused by the ship being on fire, proved to be caused by the fireballs, which the pirates had thrown to intimidate us. This being a favourite mode of attack with them.

"On reaching the deck, we, the captain, supercargo and myself, advanced about a foot, when a shower of fire-balls compelled us to beat a hasty retreat.

"What could be their motive in thus risking a conflagration, we could not imagine, seeing that their object was plunder.

"The captain, whose only means of defence was the revolver, advised us to hide ourselves.

"Vain precaution; they would ransack every part of the vessel; but yet our fears would not allow us to remain.

"Hastily descending between decks, we secreted ourselves as well as we could. Five of the sailors had already sought refuge in the same place; but what had become of the rest we could not tell. As for Fou Chou, he had not been seen since the previous evening.

"The pirates, after the most fiendish yells and capers, now entered the cabin, overturning everything in their reach.

"At last the well known voice of Fou Chou, whom they had just discoverd, reached our ears. A loud altercation seemed to be going on between him and the pirates. Evidently they were demanding of him where the remainder of the crew were secreted, for we heard him shouting out in English,—

"Captain, captain, where are you? Are you below? Answer me, come, come, directly."

"But no one stirred.

"The captain grasped his pistol tightly, vowing to blow out the brains of the first pirate that showed himself.

"We had not long to wait.

"Footsteps were approaching our hiding place.

"The hatches were removed, and a lantern suspended to a rope, was lowered into the hold.

"We hustled close together, shrinking from the light that slowly descended.

"But it was useless, in a few seconds half a dozen pirates, armed to the teeth, stood glaring before us.

"The captain advanced to meet them.

"Holding out his pistol with the butt end towards them, he made signs that he submitted.

"Seeing that no resistance was offered, they examined us with savage delight, and then compelled us to go on deck.

"On reaching the deck, a crowd of pirates, with pistols cocked and swords drawn, surrounded us, casting fiery and vengeful glances.

"The jewellery I had especially excited their curiosity, and dreading their brutal roughness, I at once divested myself of all I had, and threw them at their feet.

"The sea still ran high; huge masses of black clouds, the vestiges of the tempest, drifted across the sky, losing themselves in the distant horizon.

"The poor *Calibran*, a mere floating hull, heaved and tossed at her anchor like a pontoon.

"A thick fog then came on, freezing our very marrow with cold.

"All this while the pirates were scattered throughout the ship, pillaging everything, leaving us on deck, bound hand and foot.

"Having apparently satisfied their cupidity, the pirates returned on deck, and commenced terrifying us with the most barbarous and fiend-like gestures.

"'Be not afraid,' said Fou-Chow, 'they only intend to intimidate you.'

"This good man, by his untiring zeal and kindness, had succeeded in persuadiug the wretches to spare our lives.

"The chief of the pirates then came forward, and commanded the anchor to be raised, and to steer for a neighbouring bay.

"We were therefore unbound, that we might assist to work the ship.

"The last shadows of night fled before the coming dawn, when the clanking of an iron chain was heard, a heavy plunge followed, and a sudden jerk told us that we had reached our destination.

"The anchor was cast.

"All day we worked incessantly, with drawn swords over our heads, and, through the intercession of Fou-Chow, we had a few broken biscuits thrown to us.

"This was all we had that day.

"Next morning, at daybreak, a great bustling took place on deck, and some of the sailors came running to us with the welcome intelligence that the pirates were leaving the ship.

"We all came on deck on receiving this news, and sure enough we saw the fleet of junks some distance off, whilst we lay at anchor, helpless like a log.

"At first we felt grateful that the cursed crew of pirates were gone; but when the first flush of our joy was over, we began to think of our condition, and the best means to alleviate it.

"Alas! exhausted and weak, we sought that which we most required—food, when to our horror we discovered that the miscreants had carried off every scrap of provisions.

"All were aghast at the prospect before us.

"What could we do?

"Night came on.

"It was still piercing cold, and scarcely a rag could we find to cover ourselves with.

"Tired and worn out and famished, we laid ourselves down to rest, perhaps to sleep, and forget our sufferings a while.

"But sleep refused to seal my eyelids, though all around me were oblivious to the outer world—poor fellows!

"At last I felt it was vain to toss about in search of sleep, so I got up and stole silently on deck.

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"All was calm and still.

"The stars above were shining.

"I thought I heard a strange noise.

"Walking towards the poop, I looked over on to the sea, and to my surprise saw a small junk with four Chinese pirates in her.

"They were busy in packing some of the spoils that they had taken from our ship while we slept that the other pirates had passed over.

"A sudden thought flashed across my brain.

"I hurried back to the captain and crew whom I had just left.

"They were still asleep.

"'Captain, captain!' I cried. 'Awake!'

"Opening his eyes, he exclaimed,—

"'What's the matter now? Have those cursed pirates come back again?'

"'No; but there is a chance to escape now, I think. There's a junk alongside with only four wretches in it. Can we not fall upon them and seize the vessel, and sail for some friendly port?'

"'Ah!' said he, 'that might do.'

"The men now gathered round, and the captain repeated to them the plan I had thought of.

"After a little deliberation, it was decided that we should carry it out.

"Accordingly, we dragged our weary forms on deck, having laid hold of anything we could that might serve as a weapon.

"Slowly and cautiously we crept along the deck, until we reached the poop. For some moments the captain gazed on the wretches in the junk, as if weighing the chances of an encounter.

"Returning to us, he whispered certain directions, and breathlessly we advance.

"With stealthy caution, the captain and several of the sailors creep over the taffrail, and hang suspended over the junk.

"The Chinese were so busy with their occupation that they neither heard nor saw anything.

"Simultaneously they dropped into the boat.

"A yell of surprise and fear burst from the four Chinamen, and ere they could recover their surprise or make any resistance, they were seized by the throat, effectually stopping any further outcries.

"It was horrible! I sicken when I think of it. Yet what could I do? Three of them were hurled overboard, and were, of course, drowned.

"The other we spared, as we thought he might be useful to us afterwards.

"So far all was successful.

"No time was lost in embarking the rest of our company: and, after a very short interval, we cut the rope that held us and set sail—the dismantled hull of the unfortunate *Calibran* gradually disappearing from our view.

"As soon as we were fairly out of sight of the ship, we fell to with the provisions we found on board, for we were now ravenous with hunger. Then, overcome with what we had gone through, and the reaction consequent on our altered position, we one by one fell asleep.

"I don't know how long I had been asleep, but I was awakened by feeling something wet and warm splash on my cheek.

"I started up, and beheld with horror, by the light of the moon that now shone out, the accursed Chinaman, whose life we had spared, in the very act of stabbing one of the sailors.

"With a cry of terror, I shouted out.

"But it was too late!

"The long knife the miscreant held descended, and pierced the sleeping man's breast, and a gush of blood followed.

"Almost at the same moment, as I cast my eyes around, the light of the moon revealed to me the upturned faces of my companions closed in the sleep of death; and the wet, warm feeling on my cheek that had awakened me was the blood of one of my murdered comrades that had spurted out as the knife pierced him.

"My blood ran cold with horror. Every one but myself were murdered.

"I was alone with the demon: and he armed.

"My cry had startled him; but quickly recovering himself—he ran towards me with a yell of triumph—brandishing his knife, dripping with the blood of my poor companions, whose sufferings at any rate were now over.

"Stumbling over the dead bodies of his victims, the wretch approached.

"Rising to my feet, I prepared to sell my life as dearly as possible.

"You know I am not very strong, but at that moment, I felt nerved to perform anything; it was a struggle for life or death. And, although I could not foresee whether the next moment (supposing I was successful) might not find me in worse difficulties, yet I could not face death by cold steel without a struggle.

"He came nearer, and made a desperate lunge at my breast.

"I caught his wrist in my hand, and with a dexterous jerk compelled him to drop the knife.

"It fell at our feet, and simultaneously we both stooped with the intention of picking it up.

"Then began the struggle for life.

"We twisted and writhed about, locked in each others embrace. Sometimes nearly swaying over the sides into the sea.

"For some time this lasted, until I began to feel exhausted, and the horrid fear began to creep round my heart, that I should be beaten after all. Alive to this fear, I made an extraordinary effort, and succeeded in hurling him some little distance off.

"Quick as thought, I stooped to pick up the knife. I clutched; it but ere I could rise, he was upon me again; and together we rolled on the floor of the vessel, grappling and struggling in the sanguine fluid that lay clotted around.

"I was undermost; the weight of his body almost suffocated me, and yet I could not use the knife.

"At last a slight turn gave me the advantage. I feebly plunged the steel into his side.

"With a yell of agony, he strove to rise.

"I could do no more, my strength deserted me.

"He stood up. The expression of rage, pain, and fear on his face was terrible to behold; the knife was sticking in his side. I had not thought to retain my hold of it.

"Drawing it out with a spasmodic jerk, the poor wretch staggered forward; the blood rushed out in a stream.

"He rushed upon me with the uplifted steel.

"I closed my eyes. I thought my last hour was come.

"But ere he could strike the blow that would have ended all my troubles in this world, his arm fell powerless by my side, and, with a deep groan, he fell dead across my body.

"The various emotions that I had undergone, coupled with my exhausted and enfeebled frame, and the violent concussion of the wretch's body falling upon me, knocked what little sense I had left out of me, and I became insensible.

"When I came to, a dreadful feeling of oppression was upon me. I felt locked in a chair of ice. My limbs were almost frozen, and for a moment I hardly knew where I was.

"But as the scene I had recently passed through came across my memory, a shudder of horror came

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over me, and, closing my eyes, I tried to move from under the burthen that oppressed me.

"When I succeeded in gaining my feet, I looked round with a feeling of despair.

"Here was I alone on the wide ocean. I knew scarcely anything of navigation, with the corpses of my murdered companions around me.

"The day broke.

"The wind had freshened considerably, and I found that we had sailed far out of sight of the *Calibran*.

"I sat down and watched the sail as the wind swayed it about. A sort of apathy came over me, and I felt as if I didn't care now what became of me.

"By and bye, I aroused myself, and thought I would rid the boat of the dead bodies. Accordingly, I dragged them one by one to the gunwale, and pushed them over, until the blood alone remained to tell the tale of murder.

"All that day the wind continued the same, and the junk sped swiftly on, until I began to hope that it would ultimately bear me to some friendly place after all.

"That night I slept sounder than I had yet, and to lessen my sufferings the weather became warm. The boat was evidently approaching a warm climate.

"It was broad daylight when I awke.

"The sun was shining bright and hot on the ocean,

"I started up and looked inquiringly around me.

"There was a great change.

"The junk was no longer alone on the sea.

"In every direction I beheld swarms of boats, and beyond the minarets of a great city, and beyond that, high and rocky mountains rising towards the sky.

"Ere I could imagine what would happen next, some of the boats rapidly approached and surrounded me.

"The language and the costume of my new assailants were entirely strange to me.

"I had never seen such people before, and I could form no conception as to what country they belonged.

"They appeared greatly astonished on finding a European alone in a Chinese vessel, and, amid shouts of surprise and exultation, they dragged the junk in which I was, ashore, and compelling me to land, escorted me to the Governor.

"After a time a man was found who could speak some words in the French language, and with this miserable apology for an interpreter, I was interrogated as to where I came from, and how I appeared among them alone in a Chinese boat on the open sea.

"It was with great difficulty that they could be made to comprehend all the particulars as I related them; and when apparently satisfied, I was given over to the care of the man who had acted as interpreter.

"From him I learned that I was in the city of Herat, in Persia.

"Alas! thought I, I am as far off liberty as ever.

"Though less barbarous than the Chinese pirates, yet were they a cruel and tyrannical race.

"For some days I was lodged and cared for tolerably well, and allowed the range of the house and grounds, but not the city.

"One day, when my jailor was out in attendance on the Court, I strayed as usual through the garden, which was tastefully laid out with fountains and grottoes, and seated myself within the shade of a pomegranate tree, listening to the murmurs of the falling water in the fountain, and dreaming of the future, when a merry, silver laugh rang on my ear.

"It was that of a female.

"I was attracted by the sound to the spot from whence it came.

"Curiosity was uppermost in my mind, for I had not yet seen a Persian woman.

"The men of that nation are remarkably jealous of their women being exposed to the gaze of their own sex, consequently they are kept very secluded.

"The laughter still continued at intervals, mingled with another voice, also a female.

"I crept silently through the walks, till I came to a thick hedge that cut off my further progress; on looking through the thick foilage, I perceived that another garden existed there, far more beautiful than the one in which I was standing, and by the jealous manner in which it was surrounded by high walls, I had no difficulty in concluding that it was the grounds attached to the seraglio.

"But what filled me most with astonishment and delight was beholding two women seated by a murmuring fountain. They were engaged in throwing small pebbles in the water, splashing each other with the spray; and as each watched the result of her action, she would burst into joyous laughter.

"For a moment I stood spell bound,—one of them was as beautiful as a hourie. She could not have numbered more than sixteen summers, yet the nature of that clime, had transformed her into well developed womanhood. She was very lovely, and the careless innocence about her had revealed far more of her charms than was prudent.

"I know not how long I stood thus entranced gazing at this lovely girl; the other though beautiful was older, and did not attract me like the first, when I was startled by the angry and fierce voice of my jailor. I turned round hastily. He was close upon me, followed by two slaves.

"His face was inflamed with rage, and pointing me out to his followers, the two slaves seized me and threw me on the ground.

"In spite of my struggles, the wretch inflicted on me fifty blows with a thick stick on my body, or as they call it bastinadoed me.

"I fainted with the pain.

"When I came to, I found myself entirely alone, and in the dark.

"'What new misfortunes are in store for me now?' I exclaimed aloud, with a groan; and striving to rise, I sank down again with the pain I endured from the bruises all over my body.

"Some hours passed away, and I still lay exhausted on the ground, waiting for the light of day to reveal to me my situation.

"It came at last.

"And then, to my astonishment, I discovered that I was in a vast plain, surrounded, at an immense distance, by lofty rocks and mountains.

"I looked at myself, and discovered that I was almost naked.

"The revengeful wretch, prompted by jealousy, had evidently conveyed me, while insensible, to this fearful desert, there to perish with famine and cold; for it was bitter cold at night on these rocky steppes.

"I was so wretched at the prospects before me, and with the pain and suffering that I endured, that I could not refrain from weeping.

"At length I became more reconciled to my fate, and drying my eyes, prepared to examine the position I was in, and, if possible, to extricate myself from it.

"I could see no signs of the city. All around I viewed nothing but rocks and mountains. Not a

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vestige of life besides myself could I see; neither herb nor tree, man nor beast.

"Presently I espied something on the ground, a few yards from where I sat. I went closer to it, and, to my surprise, saw that it was something contained in a sack.

"'Ah,' thought I, 'they have not been so barbarous, after all.' I imagined that it contained food.

"Alas! how greatly was I mistaken.

"On opening it, who can pourtray my astonishment and horror.

"It contained the body of a female!

"A fearful suspicion flashed across my brain.

"I tore the sack hastily off the body.

"It was as I had surmised.

"The lovely girl that had entranced me in the garden lay, a murdered corse, before me.

"For a moment I stood speechless. It seemed more like a bideous dream than a reality.

"I rubbed my eyes, and looked again.

"It was too real.

"I stooped down, and clasped the beautiful form to my heart.

"'Oh, is it thus,' I cried, 'that I possess thee!'

"Round her snowy neck were the black marks of the murderer's fingers, impressed deep in the flesh.

"Tears flowed down my cheeks. I felt as if I could have died, and thus be for ever with the sweet being who had awakened so many strange emotions within me.

"Again and again I pressed the inanimate form to my heart.

"Was it fancy? or—— No, no! it could not be! and yet, methought I felt the faintest possible pulsation against my breast.

"For a moment I held my breath in an agony of suspense.

"Great God! I was not mistaken! There was life within her!

"She was not dead!!

"No one can conceive how wild and extravagant was my joy at this discovery.

"I was more like a madman than a human being.

"Hastily I sought to restore her to sensibility by every means I could devise, and at length my efforts were rewarded.

"She opened her eyes.

"Oh, heaven! what words can tell the rapture, the bliss of that moment, when her tender, melting glance pierced straight into my heart.

"It was some time ere she was sufficiently recovered to be able to sit and talk with me.

"But when the hue of health again mantled her cheek, she seemed to forget everything but he in whose society she was thrown.

"The black and midnight eyes looked more than gratitude, they looked love, such love as the children of the sun alone are capable of feeling; and clinging with innocent confidence to me, we wandered across the desert in search of the means of preserving life.

"It was now the middle of day.

"We had tasted neither food nor drink since the previous night, and consequently were deeply distressed for the want of refreshment.

"Brief as had been the term of my sojourn with the Herat interpreter, it had enabled me to pick up a few words of the Persian language; therefore, with the aid of love's language—the eyes—as well, I and Fatima understood each other very well.

"From her I learnt that, when the interpreter was bastinading me, my cries had alarmed her and her companion in the garden, and peeping through the hedge, they had seen and at once understood the beating I was experiencing.

"As soon as it was over, the tyrant who had inflicted it discovered her gazing with pity and sympathy, and his jealous heart at once jumped to the conclusion that she was false.

"To strangle her, as he thought, was the work of a moment, and placing her body in a sack, conveyed it, together with my insensible self, to this stony desert, where, by a refinement of cruelty and vengeance, he hoped to increase the agony of my death.

"Fatima proved a valuable assistant to me, for her knowledge of the neighbourhood enabled us to make at once for a place of safety, which she assured me was not far distant.

"We walked some miles in silence.

"The plain now assumed a different aspect.

"Vast boulders of stone strewed the ground, looking like fragments by some means detached from the mountains which were contiguous, and our progress was slow and dangerous.

"Fatima informed me, with some alarm, that we had strayed into a part of the plain that had long been shunned as dangerous, from a horde of robbers that infested the caves in the rocks.

"And, as if to confirm her words, we came upon the dead body of a horse, and a little farther that of a man.

"Both horse and man had evidently perished by violence, and, by the absence of anything valuable about the man's body, for the sake of plunder.

"I stood aghast at the sight, until Fatima, arousing me from my reverie, signed to me to take the dead man's garments.

"It had not occurred to me, though I was nearly naked; and after Fatima had hinted at it, I felt a sort of repugnance.

"But at last I overcame my scruples, and I was soon attired in the strange man's garments.

"Singularly enough, they fitted as if they had been made for me, and I looked no doubt as well in them as the original owner.

"The darkness of night now descended on us, and with the half-terrified girl clinging tightly to my arm, I sought for one of the numerous caves formed by the rocks, that we might pass the night under shelter.

"It was pitchy dark.

"We could not see a yard before us as we entered the cave we had decided on.

"However, we were so tired and exhausted with fatigue and want of food, that we gladly laid our weary forms on the stony ground, thankful that we were at least sheltered from the bitter night wind.

"Clasped in my arms, her head nestled in my bosom, we forgot our woes in the presence of love's ecstatic bliss.

"Oh! the memory of that moment haunts me now—happiness too brief for one so unfortunate as I.

"We slept.

"Next morning I awoke, with the light streaming full on my face.

"I looked round for my beloved companion.

"She was gone.

"I started up in grief and alarm.

"Had she arisen and merely gone forth to quaff the morning breeze?

"Or had ought happened to deprive me of her society for ever?

"I rushed out of the cave; I looked in every direction, in the hopes of seeing her white garments—but in vain.

"I shouted her name.

"The echoes of the rocks mocked me, and reiterated my frantic cries.

"Suddenly a number of men, in strange cos-

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THE ROYALIST AND THE COUNT.

tume, issued from the numerous crags, and surrounded me.

"They were all dressed alike, in long white flowing robes, with cowls that covered their faces all but the eyes, which gleamed bright and fiercely.

"The evil repute of the neighbourhood, which Fatima had told me, at once occurred to me.

"They were robbers, I said to myself.

"So I made signs to them, that I possessed nothing.

"They understood me, and I saw that I had mistaken them; they were not robbers. With an indignant howl, they rushed upon me with drawn swords.

"I folded my arms in despair, and awaited my death.

"I cared little whether I lived or not, now the light of my existence was gone.

"At the same time, I would not let them see that I feared them, and I looked dauntlessly in their fierce eyes.

"For an instant, the points of a score of swords were held menacingly to my breast, then, with an indescribable sound, that told of hate, they dropped their weapons, and I was forcibly seized behind, my arms pinioned, and then unceremoniously pushed forward

"The strange company then closed round me, and I was marched off.

"After proceeding some distance in silence, we reached the base of the mountain.

"A large fissure, behind a vast boulder, that effectually hid it from view in front, appeared, and without any hesitation, we plunged into the darkness.

"Still maintaining a profound silence, they forced

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me some distance in the darkness, then halting, an order was issued, and suddenly a dozen torches were lighted, throwing a strange and fitful light on the scene.

"Again we moved forward.

"It seemed as if we were entering the bowels of the earth.

"A vague fear came over me.

"Whither were they leading me, and to what fate had they condemned me.

"The light of the torches glared on the glittering quartz that walled the passage through which we proceeded, but still no sound, save the tread of many feet, could be heard.

"Again we halted.

"A kind of parley ensued, followed by a noise like the withdrawal of bolts.

"Once more we moved forward.

"For a minute I started back, half blinded with the blaze of light, that the open door revealed.

"But when I could at length see, I was astonished at the scene I beheld.

"I found myself, when I gazed around, in a vast hall, hewn out of the solid rock, lighted by thousands of lamps.

"In the centre, at the far end, was a throne, on which I beheld seated a man, clothed in similar garments to those who had brought me hither.

"Ranged round, were many more, all in similar costume.

"At length we reached the foot of the throne, and prostrating themselves before him who occupied it, my custodians pushed me in front.

"'Ah! Hassam,' said he who sat on the throne, 'thou hast done well;' then, turning to me, he continued in a loud and stern tone, 'Ho, ho, thou white face, wherefore comest thou.'

"I looked but spake not, though I comprehended his meaning.

"He waved his hand.

"Immediately, those who had conducted me hither, placed me in a seat, and brought me food, of which I ate ravenously, for I was almost starved.

"Then, clapping his hands, a strange scene of confusion followed.

"All present threw themselves into strange and singular attitudes, apparantly as acts of devotion; a low, monotonous chant followed, gradually swelling, till it reached an altitude of shrillness approaching a scream.

"They now produced thongs, and commenced flogging each others backs till they howled with pain.

"At last it occurred to me what they were; they belonged to that class of fanatics, known as dervishes.

"I had heard and read of their strange and barbarous customs, and that did not assure me of speedy deliverance.

"They now ceased their actions, apparently from exhaustion, and, squatting in a vast circle round their chief, they bent their heads forward, and remained silent.

"The chief, still seated, then commenced an harangue, to which the company listened with the profoundest attention.

"He ceased—a few minutes of deathlike stillness followed; then again clapping his hands, all present sprang to their feet.

"A scene of the wildest revelry then ensued.

"Strains of music floated through the vault; crowds of beautiful women issued from numerous passages, and joined the dervishes, and flinging off their outer garments, all joined in a wild and extravagant dance.

"I looked on in speechless wonderment.

"Presently, the music played to a faster measure; the dance became wilder, and the actions of the dancers became more wanton and lascivious.

"I dare not tell you what followed; but I saw enough to awaken within me feelings of pity at the sensuous and abandoned wickedness of these women, and those who professed to be the priests of religion.

"But, oh, I little thought what was to happen next.

"The chief, at this juncture descended from his throne, and giving a signal, a figure, veiled from head to foot was brought into the hall.

"Advancing to meet her, the chief, stretched forth his hand, and as he came close to her he tore the veil from her face.

"Never shall I forget the anguish of that moment.

"It was Fatima.

"Involuntarily a cry of surprise burst from my lips.

"She started and looked up.

"Our eyes met.

"With a low wailing cry, she stretched out her hands as if praying for assistance, and then sank to the ground in a swoon.

"'Wretch,' cried I, rushing towards him, 'you have killed her.'

"But ere I could reach him, a dozen hands seized me, and forced me back.

"I raved and tore my hair, and struggled like a madman.

"But it was useless. It only excited the laughter and ridicule of those fiends in human shape.

"The females now congregated round my lost love, and with jeers and scoffs attempted to restore her to sensibility. In the meantime, they tore off every bit of clothing she had on, and by the time she recovered her senses, she stood up in all her natural loveliness, exposed to the satyr gaze of these monsters.

"I cannot tell you more.

"Horror of horror! they drove me mad.

"For weeks I lay betwixt life and death.

"Her outraged and murdered form, was ever present to my imagination.

"Her last cry of agonised despair, as all hope deserted her, together with the dying moans, when death mercifully released her, rang with terrible distinctness in my ear. Never—never, in the world can I feel happy again.

"Life is now a blank, I care not how or when the final closing of this to me troublesome life may come."

Fred Greatorex ceased, and buried his face in his hands.

Tom Starling for awhile remained quiet, for he was deeply moved at the recital of so many misfortunes. But at last, raising his head he said,—

"But, Fred, how did you get out of those infernal devilish clutches, after all?"

"Well, Tom," answered Fred they had no particular wish to kill me, all they wanted was that poor girl, who unfortunately had excited their desires when stealing into the cave where we slept they beheld her loveliness.

"Oh, how I curse my indolent self for sleeping so sound, when that poor martyr was torn from my side.

"But, alas! regrets are useless now.

"When they found that I was dangerously ill, they cast me forth into the wilderness.

"Fortunately my condition excited the compassion of an old woman, who lived a life of holy seclusion among the rocks.

"Thanks to her care, I recovered. And no fu

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ther hindrance happening, I went forth a saddened and broken-hearted man.

"I wandered across the country, and ultimately reaohed Russia on foot.

"There I obtained sympathy and assistance from our ambassador, and speedily afterwards was on my way to my native land, when the same ill fortune that had hitherto pursued me, followed me still; we were captured, almost in sight of England, by a French brig, and again I am a prisoner.

"I was transferred to this ship, in which I have fortunately met with a friend in you."

"Well, may I be scuttled fore and aft," said Tom, "If that ain't the rummiest yarn I ever heard."

"Ah, and it's true, Tom, and that's the worst part of it," said Fred, sadly.

"Well, cheer up, don't be so down in the mouth, though its deuced hard, I own, to lose one's sweetheart, in such a cursed fashion."

"No, Tom; there is no more cheerfulness for me now."

Tom scratched his head, as a sign that he was puzzled.

His own spirits were so buoyant and cheerful, even under the most adverse circumstances, that he could not understand the despondency manifested by Fred Greatorex.

"I shall not be much longer in this world; of that I feel a certain presentiment," said Fred, mournfully.

"Damn it, Fred, don't run out your cable like that."

"I can't help it. It is my destiny."

"May I be keel-hauled, if I know what that means."

"It means, that do what I will, an irresistible power turns the current of my fate in contrary direction to that which I held at starting."

They were now disturbed by the entry of some of the crew, and all converse being at end, they separated.

"Poor Fred," muttered Tom, as the latter disappeared from his view.

Tom soon after went on deck, for the officer of the ship in which he now was held in durance vile, was of a kind and generous disposition, and pitied these whom the fortune of war had thrown into the power of an enemy. Therefore, he allowed Tom to walk the deck, and breathe the air he loved so well.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE ESCAPE FROM BREST—THE OLD PENSIONER—THE FOREST.

The day was some hours old ere Florence and Carry awoke.

Fatigued with the previous day's wandering, following so soon after a sea voyage, they had slept on in peaceful unconsciousness of all they had suffered or were likely to suffer.

A low tap at the door of their bedroom succeeded in awakening them to the recollection of where they were.

"Who is there?" cried Florence, who, on all occasions, now she was with those whom she regarded as her friends, assumed the part of spokeswoman.

"It is me, my dear."

"Oh, it's Mrs. Dupre," said Florence, turning to Carry. "Come in, ma'am."

Mrs. Dupre, thus permitted, turned the handle of the door and entered.

Her face wore an expression of anxiety, that at once infected Florence and Carry with alarm.

"My dear Mrs. Dupre, is anything the matter?"

"No, no;" replied the old lady, evasively.

"I'm sure there is something wrong," cried Florence, earnestly. "Oh! if we have been the means of bringing yourself and nephew into trouble, I shall never, never forgive myself."

And Florence wrung her hands with grief and vexation as she spoke.

"Well," said Mrs. Dupre, "there is nothing the matter as yet; but I greatly fear that your longer stay here will be fraught with danger and trouble."

"Alas, alas!" said Florence, looking woe-begone indeed.

"But what is the danger that threatens us?" inquired Carry, now speaking for the first time.

"You have been observed by some of the secret police, and the singularity of two ladies, unattended, walking for so many hours through the streets, has led to the imagination that you are spies."

"Great Heaven! how absurd."

"Yes, it is certainly absurd that two inoffensive women should cause alarm, and give rise to State persecution, for that is what it will assuredly become."

"What can be done?" said Carry.

"We must leave," replied Florence.

"Yes;" added Mrs. Dupre. "Your only chance of safety depends on hastening away from where those who seek to harm you may find you."

"True! it is our only chance."

"Why not return by the same vessel that brought you here?" said Mrs. Dupre. "You will never be in danger there. Once on English ground, you are safe from a thousand ills that threaten you on this blood-steeped soil."

"Never, never! No, never! till the task I have undertaken be accomplished," cried Florence, with deep fervour. "If I fail, and death should be my portion, I am prepared to cheerfully accept the alternative. My course is decided, I must on—on."

Mrs. Dupre looked surprised, but quickly resuming her habitual expression of countenance, she said,—

"Well, well, it is no business of mine, only I certainly do feel a little anxious about you, and could wish that you had altered your mind."

Florence shook her head.

"No, no," she murmured, "It cannot be."

At that moment a loud knock was heard at the outer door.

Florence and Carry turned pale, and looked at each other, while Mrs. Dupre stood speechless and trembling.

A second knock, more peremptory than the first, succeeded.

Mrs. Dupre disappeared from the room, while Florence and Carry hastily huddled on their clothes.

By the time they were dressed Mrs. Dupre returned.

"My dears, there's not a moment to lose, the *gend'armes* are at the door, and my nephew, who who has gone out to ascertain how you might best resume your journey, has not yet come back."

"Alas! how can we escape them?"

A low growl from the dog, who till now had not manifested any signs of wakefulness, or even life, now drew their attention.

"Hush, Victor! you will betray us," whispered Florence.

"Quick!" cried Mrs. Dupre, "place these cloaks and hoods on, and Bernard shall see you safe on your way."

"Bernard?"

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"Yes; he is an old and valued servant, a pensioner, and acts as our porter. He has many little curious ways about him, but he is trustworthy and brave, and worth his weight in gold. Bernard!" called out Mrs. Dupre.

The porter appeared, and touching the peak of his cap in military fashion, remained in an attitude of attention.

"Bernard, I want you to lead these ladies out of this house, through the back entrance, and conduct them safely out of the city. They are old and dear friends of your master."

Bernard looked far from being pleased with his mission.

He looked at Carry and then at Florence.

As his eyes drank in all the beauty of soul so prominently displayed in the ingenuous face of Florence, his features relaxed in their sternness, and his eyes sparkled with the light that probably animated them when the war-trump sounded to arms in the days of his early manhood.

He went away for a brief period, and re-appeared attired for the journey, not forgetting sword and pistol.

All the while the knocking at the door had continued, with scarcely any intermission, and by the sounds now heard, it seemed pretty evident that those without were bent on forcing an entrance.

"Haste! haste!" cried Mrs. Dupre, pushing the two girls forward. "And, Bernard, remember that you protect them with your life if necessary."

Bernard respectfully saluted his mistress, and then departed.

A feeling of utter lonliness and despair weighed on Florence and Carry's hearts.

They felt like felons, hunted over the world, with no hope or rest in the future.

Instinctively they clung closely to each other, as they followed the brave old porter, and the shaggy Victor brought up the rear.

It was a wretched morning; a damp mist hung over the city, chilling and oppressing the spirits of all who experienced it.

Still old Bernard plodded on, looking neither to the right or to the left, but with head erect, marched as primly as if on parade before the first consul.

They had now approached the gates of the city, and a feeling of alarm and anxiety filled the hearts of the two girls.

"How shall we evade the soldiers here?" murmured Florence.

"Alas! I dare not hope," replied Carry.

As Bernard reached the gate, the burly sergeant of the guard stepped out of the guard-house.

"What, my old friend Bernard, what brings you here?"

"Duty."

"Duty! aye, that's you; duty is your watchword, isn't it, old comrade?"

"True."

"Well, what's the duty that brings you here?"

"Order."

"Order?"

"Yes, order. These ladies are under my escort."

"Oh!" and the sergeant eyed them suspiciously. "And who the devil are they?" he continued.

"Sergeant," said Bernard, "you ought to know me by this time. You know your duty when on secret service?"

"I should think I did."

"Then so do I."

"Now, old comrade, don't be cross; I did not mean to hurt your feelings. But are you really going out of the city?"

"Yes, sergeant."

"And those ladies?"

"Yes, sergeant."

"And the dog, too?"

"Yes, sergeant."

"Well, I suppose you must; but have the ladies got their passports?"

"Now, sergeant, do you think that I, an old soldier of the Empire, would lend myself to an act of treason?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, then, do you think that I would have escorted these ladies without?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"No."

"'Sdeath! sir, do you mean to insult me?" and Bernard touched the hilt of his sword, and twirled his moustache in the most outrageous manner, all indicating a climax of wrath.

"No, no! I didn't mean that. How testy you are this morning!"

"Is it not enough to make one testy? I, an old soldier of the Glorious Empire of France, to have my honour doubted!"

"Well, there, pass on; I'll say no more."

The gate was thrown open, and Bernard passed through, followed by his charge.

He gave a silent chuckle at the success of his feigned anger, and turning round to assure himself that the ladies were following, he said,—

"Good bye, sergeant, when I return we'll have a glass together."

"Adieu, comrade, a pleasant journey to you."

Ere the gate closed on the disappearing forms of Bernard and the fugitives, the old sergeant cast a wistful look after them.

Somehow he felt that all was not right, and that he would be called to account for suffering any one to go out of the city without a pass.

There was no alternative now.

If he stopped them they might prove to have their papers all correct, and if so, his friend Bernard would never forgive him for fetching him back.

On the other hand, if it turned out that they did not hold passes, he would still be liable to censure for letting them quit the city.

So, scratching his head like one puzzled, he entered the little house by the gateway, grumbling to himself,—

"I shall lose my post."

Florence and Carry now breathed more freely.

They were passing through an open country, and, as if to smile upon their drooping efforts, the sun broke out in smiling sunshine, dispelling the misty dampness that had prevailed till now.

Their walk lay through a chalky road, lined on either side by meadows and gardens, interlaced with silvery streams; and as they increased their distance from the city, their hopes and spirits proportionately began to rise, and their appreciation and relish of the scene around them to augment.

Even the dog shared in the general feeling of pleasure.

Bernard alone seemed unchanged.

Unconscious of aught but the weight and importance of his duties, he strode on in the same precise and military step that he had started with.

Some distance had been traversed in this manner.

The road became more lonely, and the scene wilder in character; and Florence and Carry began to suffer from the effects of fatigue.

Yet still they struggled on after the sturdy pensioner, uncomplaining and resigned.

A bend of the road now brought them in view of a dense forest, through which the road passed.

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The way became rougher and steeper as they proceeded, and evidently led over a hill.

Slower and more painfully did the fugitives lift their feet; and as they entered the deep and sombre shade of the forest, a sigh of despair escaped them.

The quick ear of the old soldier caught the sound.

He knew well enough that his charge must be tired, but knowing the advantage of placing a long distance between them and their enemies, he closed both ears and eyes to distress and pushed on.

But the natural kindliness of his disposition was sorely tried, and when the uncomplaining sigh of the ladies smote his ear, it smote his heart also.

"This way, ma'amselle," said he, striking into a path leading from the road. "This way, if you please."

Mechanically they followed.

In a little while they reached a dell, from which branched several turnings.

So dense was the foliage that the light at noon was only equal to twilight.

Here Bernard halted, and turning round invited the ladies to sit on the soft grass.

Cheerfully and willingly they obeyed.

Then from some mysterious depth in his accoutrements he produced a cold chicken, some bread, and a flask of wine, which, old soldier like, he had taken the precaution to secure ere he fled from Brest.

Oh, how welcome to the famishing and fatigued fugitives were these refreshments.

The good-natured Bernard did not forget the dog; he, too, came in for his share of the good things that the old pensioner's foresight had secured.

After some time had passed in refreshment and rest, Bernard, who had by this time got rid of any dislike he might have entertained towards those now consigned to his care, spoke,—

"Now, mademoiselles, you must excuse an old soldier, but I think we must be on our march again."

"So soon," exclaimed Florence.

"Yes; we are not yet out of danger."

"Surely we are safe in this vast forest?"

"No, no; you do not know how zealously they hunt out spies in this country."

"But we are not spies."

"No; but they think you are."

Sombre and melancholy Carry sat apart.

No smile ever illumined her countenance now, and few words ever passed her lips.

Since the death of Hamet, and her acquaintance with Florence, a change had come over her.

She was no longer the same woman.

A settled expression of sadness had usurped the light-hearted gaiety that used to monopolise the features of her face, and had it not been for the attachment that had sprung up between her and Florence, she would have sunk into the lowest depths of despondency.

Mechanically the two girls arose, and prepared to resume their painful wanderings.

Had it not been for the magnetic power of love, Florence would have shrank aghast at the prospect before her; but, sustained by the depth and strength of a pure affection, she saw no difficulties that could not be surmounted, no dangers that could not be met and foiled.

Her's was indeed a pilgrimage of love.

Something similar at the bottom of Carry's heart made her sympathise with her friend, and the nobility of soul that unselfish love inspires caused her heart to respond and beat with generous desires to aid and assist all that suffer from the barb of love.

On once more they went.

The old soldier this time walking by their side encouraging with cheering words of hope. His diffidence and constraint having by this time worn off, and he now talked and acted as though he had known the two ladies all his life.

The path they had followed now began to narrow, and the trees seemed to be on all sides more numerous, and the thickets and underwood denser than before, and, what was far worse, the ground was broken and uneven, rendering pedestrianism a matter of painful difficulty.

"Courage, my daughters," cried the old pensioner, as he gently assisted first one and then the other over the uneven ground. "Courage; a short league further, and there is a snug little village yonder, where we shall find rest to our heart's content."

Sighing heavily, the girls stumbled forward.

They were too fatigued to reply.

Yet bravely they struggled on.

It was now approaching the decline of day.

The sombre light of the forest became gloomier, and objects in the pathway more and more indistinct.

The old soldier had relapsed into silence.

His looks became uneasy, and his moustaches curled with vexation.

"'Tis strange," he muttered; "I never was at fault before."

Florence, in spite of her courage and perseverance, now succumbed to the weakness and delicacy of her frame, and sinking on the ground, sighed,—

"Alas! alas! I can go no further, my strength is exhausted."

"Florence! Dear Florence!" cried Carry, in anguish. "A few more yards and we are saved. Is it not so?" she added, turning to Bernard.

Bernard looked distressed, and shook his head in silence.

"Speak!" cried Carry, in tones of alarm. "What is it that makes you shake your head?"

"I fear, my dear child, that I have mistaken the path."

"Mistaken the path?"

"Yes."

"Then we are lost in this vast and impenetrable forest?"

"Alas! yes."

"Heaven help us!" cried Carry, clasping her hands.

"Leave me," murmured Florence. "Leave me, dear Carry, and you, kind old friend. Life is nought to me. You may yet reach some haven of rest ere night closes."

"Leave you, Florence? Never! never!" cried Carry, sinking down beside the almost insensible form of Florence. "If you die, I will perish with you."

"Children, children! You'll drive me mad with grief, if you go on like that. Come, come; a little courage. All is not so bad as you think. This path may lead to some other place than the one we intended to seek. Come, let us struggle on a little further."

And tears flowed down the furrowed cheeks of the old soldier as he spoke thus.

"What an old fool I must have been to have lost myself in this part that I have known so long."

All this time poor Florence lay on the soft turf beside the pathway.

Her eyes were closed, yet she was not unconscious, for one hand was clasped in Carry's, while her head rested on her bosom; her other hand lay caressingly on the head of the faithful Victor, who, crouching down by his mistress's side, seemed to comprehend, with unerring instinct, that grief and distress was again among those he loved.

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Slightly pressing Carry's hand, Florence whispered,—

"Dear Carry, what will become of you when I am gone?"

Carry's sobs was the only answer.

"Carry, dear, I am dying. Oh! if you ever see my noble Herbert, tell him that my last prayer was for his happiness, and that my love was unchanged to the end."

Here the remembrance of love, clouded by a forced and cruel separation, was too much for her exhausted frame, and with a soft sigh she became inanimate.

"My God, she is dead!" cried Carry, in agony. "My friend! My saviour! Florence! Speak—oh, speak to me."

The old pensioner stooped beside her.

He placed his trembling hand over the region of her heart.

"She is not dead!" he exclaimed, with a joyful start; "she has swooned."

"Not dead? Oh, heaven be praised!" ejaculated Carry.

The energies of the old soldier of France seemed to revive.

Hitherto he had appeared bewildered and grieved; but now, like a warrior aroused at the call to arms, he prepared to act as became him in defence of weak and helpless women.

"My dear child," he said, laying his hand on Carry's shoulder, "arouse yourself, if you love your friend, and we will save her yet."

Rising, she stood before him, almost as resolute as himself.

Grief and alarm for the safety of the only friend she had in the wide world had driven all fatigue from her thoughts, and the body became subservient and obedient to the power and might of the will.

"I am ready," she said, drying her eyes; "what shall I do?"

"Follow me!" replied the old man, seizing the inanimate form of Florence, and placing her across his shoulder.

With a light and rapid stride, he darted on through the now darkened pathway.

Carry, without a moment's hesitation, accompanied by the dog, struggled over the broken ground after the brave Bernard.

On—on they went.

"Courage, daughter!" he would cry occasionally to Carry, as she followed close behind.

It was pitch dark.

Nothing was visible at arm's length.

Yet still they rushed on—on.

Presently they felt that the character of the pathway was changing.

They could not see it.

Yet they knew it was so.

A faint light burst on their view.

It was the starlight.

They had emerged from the path, and had entered an open space or clearing.

Bernard slackened his pace.

"Daughter," he said, turning to Carry, "we have indeed wandered far out of our way."

By the faint light of the starry orbs, a large mass of buildings and walls could be discerned rising up in the sombre distance.

"Yonder," said Bernard, "is the ruins of the old Chateau de Pont."

"Ah!" said Carry, vacantly.

"Yes; and it's there we must rest for the night, for I know by these ruins that we are far from any other shelter, and on the other side runs a wide and rapid river, across which we cannot pass without a boat. There was a bridge there, from which the chateau took its name, but now it is all in ruins, having been destroyed at the same time that the chateau was demolished."

They presently reached the front of the chateau, and stood before the portico.

There was no door, that having long ago been consumed for fuel by those who had accidentally been benighted there like our present acquaintances, but the way was choked up with bricks and stones that had fallen or been violently displaced from the arches and walls around.

Without a moment's hesitation Bernard entered, toiling with his burden over the heaped-up rubbish, followed by Carry and the dog.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE RUINOUS CHATEAU—THE STRANGE LIGHT—THE SECRET PASSAGE—A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

After passing through what had once been the doorway, they entered a spacious courtyard, around which had been ranged, in quadrangular form, the buildings constituting the chateau.

Ruinous though it was, there were evidences on every side that told how regal once was its size and magnificence.

At any other time Carry would have been lost in wonder and admiration of the vast and superb erection around her, and the old soldier would have gloried in pointing out the spots hallowed by legend and song, but now their hearts were too full of anxiety regarding their inanimate companion to indulge either in curiosity or garrulity.

The moon now showed herself, and cast her sickly beams around, throwing tower and turrets in ghostly shadow across the courtyard.

By the aid of its light Bernard hurried towards a part of the building that did not appear to have suffered so by the destroyer's hand, and entering through an opening that had once been designated a door, he passed into one of the saloons, the windows of which looked into the courtyard.

The moonbeams strayed through the unglazed window, and in spite of her natural courage, Carry kept as close as possible to Bernard, the scene was so ghostlike and so gloomy.

Cautiously and slowly Bernard passed through the saloon, and aided by the friendly light of the moon, he at last discovered an opening that led into a smaller room.

Here he decided that they should halt, and endeavour to make themselves as comfortable as possible.

Giving Florence into Carry's charge, he proceeded to seek for the means of making a fire.

He soon returned with a load of wood.

The old ruins were not exhausted yet, and groping round the room till he found the fire-place (for no moonlight penetrated into this room), he placed the wood he had gathered on the grate.

The next proceeding was to procure a light. Taking one of the pistols from his belt, Bernard drew the charge, and flashed some powder in the pan till it ignited the dry and rotten wood.

As the flames grew bright, and threw a ruddy glare around, a feeling of comfort stole over the benighted party.

Bernard and Carry now turned their attention towards Florence, whose long insensibility was now causing them some alarm.

"It is rest she most needs, poor thing," exclaimed the soldier; and taking off his coat, he endeavoured to fold it in such a manner as would serve as a bolster, and raising Florence's head tenderly, he pushed it under her.

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"There, now; you, my girl, try and bring her to, while I'll see if I can cook any coffee."

He was too old a soldier to be caught without the necessaries of camp life, however short his journey. In this instance he had not miscalculated the probable extent of his wanderings, so that his foresight and caution, proved of great value in the present emergency.

He soon produced some coffee berries, and pounding them to powder, he put them into a small tin pannakin; but one difficulty presented itself, which was the want of water.

Not at all dismayed, Bernard sallied out, and soon found the required fluid, for the nearness of the river afforded the chateau every facility for acquiring a continual supply of water.

There was now no let or hindrance to the accomplishment of his culinary preparations, and in a few minutes the graceful scent of the refreshing beverage diffused itself throughout the room.

By this time Florence had recovered sufficiently to murmur in faint accents,—

"Where am I?"

"You are safe, dearest," whispered Carry.

The old soldier now approached with the pannikin of coffee, and pouring a little out into a small tin cup, he placed it to her lips, as Carry raised her to a sitting posture.

With eyes still closed, she drank slowly of the welcome decoction. A warm glow mantled in her cheek. The life fluid coursed through her veins quicker and fuller.

She was saved!

With a sigh of relief she reclined back on the rough yet kindly pillow, and sank into a profound slumber.

"Heaven be praised," murmured Carry.

"Amen," responded the pensioner.

The old soldier now proceeded to minister to the wants of himself and Carry, who, now that the danger of losing her friend was passed, felt all the effects of a reaction.

Her nature had been strained to the utmost tension, and with a sob she sank down beside the unconscious sleeper.

But Bernard, like a good guardian angel, came in time to the rescue. The aromatic berry of Arabia again performed its function, and Carry soon after yielded to the effects of fatigue.

Sleep sealed her eyelids.

Cares and sorrows, hopes and joys were alike forgotten in nature's sweet restorer—sleep.

The old pensioner sat in silence by the red embers of the fire. He had refreshed his inner man. But rest other than that he was at present enjoying he scorned.

A sad expression was in his face, as he sat thus gazing on the fantastic images that fancy conjured out of the ever-shifting burning wood.

Was he fighting his battles o'er again, or were his thoughts dwelling on the loved and lost ones that the grave only could re-unite him to.

At last even he yielded to the effects of fatigue, and he dozed off into a fitful, uncertain sleep.

How long he had remained thus he afterwards could not tell, but he was suddenly aroused by the low whining of the dog.

The fire had entirely burnt out, and intense darkness was around him.

In a moment he resumed his wonted energy and caution.

Patting the dog on the head, he whispered to him to lie still.

Then, in an attitude of suspense, he listened.

All was quiet.

Not a sound disturbed the silence of that lonely mansion.

Still the dog betrayed signs of disquietude.

Bernard felt certain that something must be stirring to excite the perturbation of Victor.

He was by far too sagacious to be deceived by fancy.

First assuring himself that the two girls were safe, he issued from the room into the saloon, followed by the dog.

The moon was now obscured by clouds, so that in the saloon too it was very dark.

The dog rapidly led the way.

They soon reached the courtyard, across which the dog without hesitation took his way, and made direct for the wing that appeared to be the most ruinous of all the building.

Over the heaped-up rubbish that lay in the entrance of this part of the chateau they went, and Bernard found that they were in a similar saloon to that they had just left in the opposite wing, only it was far more ruinous.

Here Bernard came to a halt.

"Hist, Victor, hist! Lay down!"

At the far end of the saloon a bright light was shining through the chinks of the floor.

It was this that startled Bernard.

It was evident that the chateau had other visitors beside himself and his charge.

Slowly and cautiously Bernard stepped over the fallen rubbish, and, in obedience to a sign, the dog silently followed.

As he neared the light several voices struck upon his ear.

The language was French, but the voices were those of Bretons.

"Ho, ho!" thought Bernard, "here's a nest of treason I've found out."

Dropping on his hands and knees, he peeped through the crevices of the floor.

There, to his surprise, he beheld a well-furnished apartment.

Round a table in the centre were seated several men, attired in military costume.

In a chair raised higher than the rest sat one who, by the deference and respect he received, was evidently the chief of the party.

He was of gigantic stature, and but for his eyes and brow would have been deemed of inferior intellect; but these redeemed the otherwise sensual expression of his face.

His brow was ample, wide, and smooth, while a profusion of grisly grey hair covered his head and surrounded his face.

His eyes were bright and piercing, and in their restless depths could be seen the fire of undaunted courage and relentless cruelty!

He was attired in the military costume of an officer of the French Royalists, with the addition of a large blue sash across his shoulder—a distinction which all present wore with their costume.

On the table before them were opened several maps and books, and the sword and pistols of each lay before him ready for instant use.

"By my patron saint!" said Bernard to himself, "if they ain't the Bleus."

He was about to rise and make a prudent retreat, when his foot caught in some obstruction, and he was thrown violently to the ground.

With a muttered malediction he scrambled up and ran from the spot.

The Bleus, however, were startled, and every light was extinguished.

In his hurry to escape, Bernard dashed on through the darkness, regardless of the broken floors and the piled up *debris*, the consequence was, that he again stumbled.

This time he fell through an opening in the ground; for a moment he lay half stunned, till the

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faithful Victor licked his face in sympathetic kindness.

Once more resuming his feet, he stretched his hands out, with the view of ascertaining, by feeling, what kind of place he had fallen into.

But he was at fault. He could make nothing of it.

He tried to ascend to the floor from whence he had fallen; but the height was beyond his reach.

The old soldier scratched his head.

"What's to be done, Victor," he said, half addressing himself to the dumb brute by his side.

"I know," he ejaculated, after a moment's reflection. "I'll trust to the dog, he, perhaps, can find the way out."

The dog's bright eyes glistened in the darkness, as if he understood the words that were spoken.

"Now, Victor, boy, lead on."

The dog went forward, and Bernard followed as well as he could. By and bye he found that he could touch stone walls on either side of him.

There was no doubt, then, that he was in a subterranean passage; but whether it would lead he could not conjecture.

"If I had a light I would not care a curse!" he muttered to himself, "but to be groping along this hole in the dark I do not like."

Presently the dog gave a furious bark.

"Ah, what's the matter, Victor."

Another bark was the only answer.

Hurrying up to the dog, he found that their further progress was barred by a door.

Fortunately the bolts were on the side next to Bernard.

So he easily succeeded in drawing them back by the aid of a little strength.

As the huge door creaked back, the dog bounded through, barking more furiously than before.

Bernard followed.

A piercing shriek now burst on his astonished ears.

The voice, he could not be mistaken, was that of Florence Avery.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE BLEUS—DISCOVERY OF FLORENCE AND CARRY—THE RESCUE—FURTHER DANGERS.

THE Revolution of 1789—that inaugurated so blood-stained a page in the annals of France—had severed every tie almost of kindred or kind amongst her wretched, terror-struck people.

Change after change took place in the administration of the government.

Blood flowed like water; hatred and fear gleamed in every man's eye as he glared on his neighbour.

But there was one party who, in all the sea of trouble, remained true to their tradition.

This party comprised the principal population of the South of France and Bretagne.

Deeply impressed with the "divine right of kings," they adhered to the fortunes of the fallen Bourbons.

But the fury of the revolutionists were too much for them; and, after fearful and sanguinary conflicts, and cruel and treacherous massacres, the Royalists were compelled to fly from town and city, and take up their abode with the wild beasts of the forests.

To distinguish themselves from their enemies, they wore a blue handkerchief tied round their heads.

This gave rise to the term by which they were ever afterwards known—The Bleus.

For a time their gallant stand against the armies of the Republic caused serious annoyance to the Consulate; and Buonaparte, the first consul, indignant that the southern part of the Empire was beyond his rule, sent his best officers with express commands to exterminate the Bleus.

Worn out with privations, and the wretched life they led, exposed to the inclemence of a severe winter, the Bleus gradually dwindled to a few thousand peasants, with a mere sprinkling of the noblesse, who officered them.

Lean, and gaunt, and half straved, they in very desperation fought like fiends; the sight of them almost made the republican army avoid coming to close quarters, so fierce, so wolf-like, they looked.

To add to the bitterness of feeling, they had been promised assistance in men, money, and arms, by England.

Cruel, treacherous England! so often the hope and beacon to oppressed nations, yet ever the first to forsake them.

Day after day, anxious and hopeful glances were cast towards the coast, and night after night, they sank to their rest starved, weary, and despairing. Their women and children died around them in misery and want.

Such was the position of the Bleus at this period of our story.

The Chateau de Pont had belonged to a nobleman who had espoused the royalist cause, and like the rest of his class he had been driven to the strongholds of the Bleus. His lands confiscated, and the home of his ancestors razed and demolished.

Again old Bernard heard the shriek of Florence, and then the exclamations of rough voices.

Dashing forward, he reached the end of the passage; a flight of steps was before him.

Groping his way up them, he found the dog tearing and scratching at another door.

Placing his shoulder to it, the half rotten door gave way.

A blaze of light for a moment nearly blinded him.

Quickly recovering himself, however, Bernard rushed forward.

He beheld Florence and Carry struggling in the grasp of the very men he had seen in the subterranean chamber of the ruined saloon.

A cry of joy burst from the lips of the two girls as they recognised the old pensioner, and at the same moment an ejaculation of surprise and rage emanated from the throats of the outragers.

Ere Bernard could well understand the situation he found himself in, the dog had flown with a growl at the throat of the man who had seized Florence.

"Take off the dog!" he shouted, as he felt the fangs of Victor fasten in his throat. "Help—help!"

"Damnation!" muttered another, drawing a pistol. "I will blow his brains out if you do not call him off."

"Coward!" yelled Bernard.

"Coward?" echoed the man who had drawn his pistol.

"Aye, coward! to war with two defenceless women."

The dog by this time had brought his foe to the ground.

"Help—help!" screamed the choking wretch. "Help, or the brute will kill me!"

The man who held Carry instantly let go his hold, and rushed to the assistance of his comrade.

Thus released, the two girls flew behind old Bernard.

In vain the men tried to pull the dog off their comrade.

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With a growl of defiance, Victor flung the wretch senseless to the ground; then darting round, he flew at one of the others, and in a moment brought him down yelling with pain and fear.

"Brave dog! Good dog!" cried Bernard, with admiration.

Several others now entered the room.

"By the cross!" said one, "what's the meaning of all this?"

The accession of strength succeeded in beating off the dog, who retired to the far end of the room, where Bernard and the girls were standing, glaring with savage fury at the enemies before him.

For awhile there was a pause.

The soldiers were endeavouring to restore their discomfited companions; but their attempts were useless with the first one—he was beyond human aid.

Seizing the opportunity, Bernard whispered to the girls to fly through the opening and make good their escape, while he alone would oppose the pursuit of their enemies.

"No, no!" murmured both the girls, "we cannot go while you remain behind. Come what will, we live or die together, dear old friend."

A look of gratitude beamed in the old soldier's eye, but he shook his head.

"You must fly!" he urged again. "Indeed, my children, you must."

But all further parley was ended by the return of the enemies to the attack.

"Seize the old scoundrel," cried one.

"Aye, and the girls, tear them from him."

The two girls in an ecstacy of fear, clung round the old man's neck as the soldiers approached them.

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The dog growled and prepared to spring.

For a moment the assailants paused.

"Curse the dog!" muttered the foremost.

"Shoot him! never mind if the ball should strike the old rebel. He deserves to die."

"Yes, but we don't want to kill the girls."

"*Mon Dieu!* I care not."

So saying the fellow drew his pistol and pointed it at the dog.

Quick as thought, the dog, divining his intention, made one bound across the floor.

His jaws closed over the wrist of him who held the pistol, at the same instant, the trigger fell, a loud report was heard instantaneously with the yell of pain uttered by the man as he felt the dog's teeth in his flesh.

The ball from the pistol had struck the wall, and fallen harmlessly on the floor.

The room was filled with smoke, and nothing but the oaths and imprecations of the man struggling with the dog, mingled with the scuffle of feet could be heard.

By the time the smoke had cleared away, it was observed that the dog was again the victor.

The rest, now thoroughly enraged and alarmed, made a combined attack with their swords upon the noble and gallant animal.

This was too much for Bernard.

Gently disengaging himself from the arms of the frightened girls, he drew his sword, and at once went to the rescue of Victor.

"Dastards!" he exclaimed, as he stood before the dog, who was already bleeding from several cuts.

"Dastards! turn and wreak thy hate and vengeance on an old infirm soldier of the Empire."

With a strength that belied his statement about infirmity, Bernard dealt a blow that sent the sword of one ringing some yards away on the floor.

"Down with the old grey-beard!" cried several at once, pressing closer to the brave old man. "Down with him!"

In spite of his efforts, however, the odds began to tell on him.

His arm became weaker, and his heart heaved and panted for the breath that had well-high left him.

The girls saw his danger, and would have rushed forward, but one of the men stood before them, and, with a grin of triumph, advanced towards them.

They shrieked in terror.

The sound unnerved the old soldier.

He struck out wildly, and a blow fell on his unguarded shoulder.

He staggered, and fell upon one knee.

The swords of his foes were presented at his throat.

Bernard closed his eyes.

He felt that his life was at last ingloriously to close.

Hitherto he had restrained the dog from partaking in the fray; but now his gesture and words had ceased.

The noble brute saw the danger of his friend, and, with a fierce bark, he again sprung forward.

Bernard was saved!

Once more the combat raged with fury.

Seeing the danger of the girls, who were being forced from the room by the man who had prevented them joining him in his late peril, the old soldier dashed after them, leaving the dog to keep the others at bay.

In a moment he stood by their side.

With a howl of rage and pain the man released his hold as Bernard's sword passed through his body, and he sank to the floor writhing in agony.

Presently the door opened, and the man whom Bernard had seen presiding in the subterranean passage entered.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he shouted, as his cold bright eye glanced on the curious group in the room.

No heed was at present taken.

A look of anger flashed from his eyes as he strode towards the combatants.

"By the head of St. Dennis, this is too much. Hold! I command ye."

This time the voice fell on the ears of the Bleus with magic effect.

Every arm dropped, and every head hung down in shame.

Bernard, with Florence and Carry clinging to his left arm, with Victor before them, stood grouped at the far end of the apartment.

"By my life, a noble scene!" scornfully exclaimed the tall stranger who had last entered. "Truly, you are gallant soldiers, and will bring great honour to the cause whose colours ye wear."

There was no response.

"Could ye not find better objects for your steel than that old man and these two girls? Away with ye!" he added, with an imperious wave of his arm. "Away with ye!"

In a moment the apartment was cleared.

"Saved! saved!" murmured Florence.

"Not so," replied Bernard. "There's a Bleu before us yet; and I never knew any other than mischief to come from them."

"Ha! Say you so?" cried the stranger, walking close up to where they stood.

Bernard raised his sword, and Victor growled and showed his fangs.

"Nay, put up your sword, old man; I seek not to harm ye."

"I don't know that," replied Bernard.

"Tush! see you not that I am unarmed?"

And the stranger held up his hands, which were weaponless.

Bernard nodded his head in token of assent.

Yet, withal, a look in his eyes showed that he still mistrusted the stranger.

Folding his arms across his breast, the chieftain of the Bleus questioned Bernard in the following manner:—

"Thy name?"

"Bernard St. Pierre."

"Thy calling?"

"Pensioner of the Grand Army of France."

"Aye! a rebel."

"Late a sergeant in the fifth corps of the Italian Legion," continued the old man, without heeding the stranger's interruption.

"And whither art thou going?"

"To Spain."

"To Spain?"

"Even so."

"And the ladies?"

"They accompany me, monsieur."

"Your daughters, I presume?"

"No, monsieur."

"Who, then?"

"Friends."

"Hark ye, sir pensioner; I don't like mysteries. So you had better make a clean breast of it, and tell me at once, why you are here? where you are going? and who you are?"

"I have told you my name, and where we are going; what more would you have?"

"Why are you here?"

"We were benighted, and sought shelter in these ruins."

"Umph!"

"Those men who have just left the room at-

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tempted to outrage these ladies, who are under my charge, and I resisted them."

"A brave soldier! Would I had a few of thy sort," muttered the stranger. "Well, proceed," he added.

"These ladies are English, and are on their way to join their friends in the English army in Spain, under my escort."

"Ah! say you so? Then you are not a rebel, after all?"

"In truth, I am, if you can call those who love their country and hate her oppressors, rebels."

"But, man, you say you are going to the English army, and England's monarch is the ally of our gracious king."

"Only to conduct these ladies there; that accomplished I return to France, true and unchanged."

"Ah! Obstinate old man! Well—well; It'll serve my purpose," muttered the stranger to himself; then, in a louder tone, he added—"You shall have safe conduct through our lines, but, on one condition."

"Condition?" echoed Bernard.

"Yes."

"Name it."

"When you reach the English camp, tell the general in command that you bear despatches from the Marquis of Delanque."

"The Marquis of Delanque?" echoed Bernard, with surprise.

"The same. And, moreover, I shall expect that you will protect them from our enemies with your life."

"It is treason. I cannot do it."

"Then, you must die!"

"I can die but once."

"Even so; but remember the ladies—must they die also?"

Bernard looked perplexed, and twirled his moustache.

At this juncture Florence stepped forward.

"Give me the despatch, sir; I will undertake to carry them, even at the risk of my life. It will not be treason in me."

"Nobly resolved!" cried the stranger, with admiration. "You English women are peerless in courage as in beauty. No wonder such mothers produce a race of heroes."

"Then, we are free?" cried Florence.

"Yea, from this moment. Here is the despatch—I commend it to your care."

He drew from his bosom a sealed packet, and handed it over to Florence.

Bernard looked on gloomy and silent.

There was a struggle in his bosom.

Should he seize the packet, and, after ascertaining its contents, reveal them to the government he acknowledged?

Or should he shut his ears and eyes, and suffer events to take their own course?

"And here is a pass," added the marquis, writing in pencil on a slip of paper he tore from his note book.

Bernard took it mechanically.

"In another hour it will be daybreak. You must begone ere it is light. You can cross by the bridge, a league higher up the stream, and there you will find horses waiting for you to hasten you on your journey. Mount, and ask no questions."

"Thanks, thanks! noble sir," ejaculated Florence and Carry, who were overjoyed at the prospect of liberty, and the hope of reaching the army of England.

"No thanks are due to me, ladies. You but render me a service in return for your liberty, so we are quits."

"I hope, marquis, there is no harm intended to France in that despatch," said Bernard, with a mixture of anxiety and effrontery.

"No, no! rest you content. All that we do is for the benefit and welfare of France. So, *au revoir*, old friend. Would that I could persuade you to join our sacred cause," he earnestly added. "I could promise a troop of horse."

"No, no, marquis, it cannot be!"

"Well, adieu! Adieu, fair ladies!"

And the tall and graceful form of the Royalist left the room.

For an instant Bernard and the girls looked at one another in surprise and hesitation.

The late events that had happened seemed to them like a dream.

But the small packet that Florence still held in her hand at once proved the reality of the events that had occurred.

"Well, girls, there is no time to lose," said Bernard. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good; and the danger we have just escaped has, after all, proved of service, since it will enable us to reach Spain somewhat easier than we otherwise should."

Their little preparations were very soon completed.

So once more the wanderers stood in the courtyard of the chateau, ready to battle and struggle with the outward world in their pilgrimage to Spain.

Florence was completely restored to her usual health.

The expectation of soon seeing her beloved Herbert having materially assisted her.

As for Victor, he was not so badly hurt as was at first supposed, and, accordingly, was as well prepared for the march as any of them.

It was still dark as the old soldier led the way out of the courtyard of the chateau, followed by the girls and the dog.

The low murmur of the wind as it played amid the ruined towers, and the sullen roar of the river, that rushed and eddied through the broken arches of the bridge, were the only sounds that disturbed the solitude.

Not a vestige of their late assailants was now visible.

None who beheld that blackened ruin could imagine that aught living was at that moment secreted within it.

Yet so it was.

CHAPTER LXVII.

DEATH OF FRED GREATOREX—TOM STARLING'S ESCAPE—AN ENCOUNTER.

THERE was a sudden commotion visible to the practised eye of Tom Starling among the officers and men composing the crew of the French vessel that held Tom a prisoner.

News had arrived that the English fleet were on their way to the south of France, with supplies for the distressed and wretched partizans of the Bourbons.

Every available ship of war was at once ordered on active service.

Even the vessel that Tom Starling was on board of was commanded to join the fleet intended for attack.

A few hours afterwards saw the French armament standing well out, wind and weather favouring its progress over the buoyant and sparkling element.

The shores of France receded from view, and as the evening closed, entirely disappeared.

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There was joy and exultation on board that night.

The French sailors, as usual, counted victory as sure and inevitable, and instead of preparing for any contingency that might occur, gave themselves up to every pleasure and delight that their lax discipline permitted.

The night passed away, the morning broke, and far off in the distant horizon could be discerned the masts and rigging of the English fleet.

A shout of joy burst from a thousand throats as they discovered, far ahead, those they sought.

The breeze still favoured the French, and all was bustle and preparation on board their ships.

Every stitch of canvas was set to catch the wind, and as the day advanced, they could perceive that they were unmistakeably gaining on the English fleet.

Tom Starling, like a caged lion, panted below.

He was not allowed on deck.

But through one of the port-holes of his prison he beheld, with excitement and hope, the distant fleet of his glorious countrymen.

Once met broadside to broadside, and hand to hand, the result he knew would be the victory of the Saxon race over that of the Gaul.

Tom's face flushed with pride, and his eyes dilated as the thought of those of his native land who had fallen, crowned with unfading laurels, occurred to his memory.

At that moment Fred Greatorex entered, and walking up to Tom, laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Tom," he said, "ere another sun rises and gilds yon waves with its glory, I shall be no more."

Tom looked up with surprise.

"Nonsense," replied Tom; "you are full of fancies. Come, rouse yourself, and look at those dear old hulls of ours. Is it not a glorious sight? Oh! how I wish I was on board o' one o' them frigates, ready to send them mounseers a lesson they won't forget in a hurry!"

Tom rubbed his hands with childish delight, as he gloated over the stirring scenes his imagination conjured up.

Fred Greatorex only sighed.

"Ah!" said Tom, "that comes of falling in love. You should be like me, and throw women's wiles to the winds."

"Alas! you know not the magic power of love; you have not yet seen the woman whose image haunts you wherever you be—in the gloomy night-watch, in the storm, in the noonday glare of the tropical sun, or in the uproar of battle."

"Avast there, mate!" said Tom, looking thoughtful and solemn. "Now you come on that tack, you do bring it somewhat to my mind. But start my planks if I call that love!"

"Call what love?" inquired Fred Greatorex, languidly.

"Why, when a pretty figure-head dances before you, up in the rigging when aloft, or on the water when you looks at the the fishes. I've seen that; but you don't mean to say that that's what they call love?"

"I've no doubt after all, Tom, that some little craft has found a resting-place in your heart. You are too good-hearted and good-looking, methinks, to be long without a mate."

"Well, you bring me up all of a heap! Tom Starling in love! No, no, it can't be. But, lor' bless her little heart! I wonder where she is, poor little Snowdrop!"

Tom stood thoughtful and dejected.

But quickly recovering his natural flow of spirits, he turned to Fred and said,—

"Well, Fred, let us hope that yonder fleet will gain us our liberty."

Fred shook his head.

"Not for me, Tom; the only freedom for me exists beyond the tomb. To-night remember my words, and think with pity on your lost friend."

"Damn it, man, you make me feel all abroad with your croaking talk. Come, cheer up. See how near we are to the English fleet!"

It was useless to attempt to draw Fred Greatorex from his melancholy.

He laboured under a strong presentiment that he should not out live the day.

Strange, inscrutable mystery.

It proved too true.

Yet, whence comes this mystic power of foresight?

Who can tell?

The English fleet had taken in sail.

Though inferior in numbers to the French, they scorned to fly.

And when the intentions of the French were perceived, the bold British tars of old England turned exultingly to meet them.

Tacking about, they lay in a semi-circle, broadside to broadside, awaiting the attack.

It wanted three hours of nightfall.

The English ships lay about a quarter of a mile distant from each other, offering every opportunity for the French to pass on and lay alongside.

The French admiral looked pleased at what he thought was his enemy's oversight.

But it was not so.

The British admiral had little fear of losing the victory.

All he wanted to secure was the enemy's ships, and he knew he could not do that till he was to the windward of them.

On came the French, sailing majestically before the wind.

Every voice was hushed.

The French seventy-four led the van, and, in a short time, without firing a shot, they steer right through the British fleet.

As they passed a roar of artillery burst from the sides of each vessel, French and English, followed by a genuine English cheer.

The charm of silence was broken, the dogs of war were let loose, and hell itself could not outrival the turmoil and din.

The moment the English ships had fired their broadsides the signal was given, and ere the smoke had lifted up the French saw their enemy ranged before them to windward.

They saw too late the manœuvre.

An unbroken front was before them, pouring in a terrible and continuous fire.

In vain they sought to break it.

There they lay broadside to the wind, head to stern, slowly bearing down on the French; while behind were the smaller vessels and frigates, cut off from the main body, suffering from the larboard broadsides of the English.

By slow degrees the fire of the French fleet slackened.

Several of their vessels lay dismasted—complete wrecks.

The day was fast declining, and some of the French vessels who were not entirely crippled sought to effect their escape—hoping in the coming darkness to evade their pursuers.

But they were too completely in the power of the British.

Ship after ship struck her colours to the victorious and hated English, and the darkness closed on the complete rout of the French fleet.

It was useless to pursue them further, and the

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British admiral signalled to lay to till morning, merely drifting with the tide.

Soon after the action had commenced a stray shot pierced the hull of the vessel in which Tom and Fred were prisoners; and, to the horror and consternation of Tom Starling, stretched poor Fred a lifeless corpse at his feet.

Tom, however, had not much time to lament the untimely and tragical end of his friend.

He was quickly aroused to a sense of his own danger.

The shots fell like hail, notwithstanding their distance from the thickest of the engagement, and the vessel soon began to show signs of a leakage.

A shot had evidently pierced her hull below the water-line, and she rapidly filled.

To die like a rat drowned in a cage was not at all to Tom's liking.

So, after ineffectually endeavouring to make his captors hear and let him forth, he determined to get out his own way, if possible.

He stripped off his jacket, and took off his boots, and then prepared to battle and buffet with the waves, and endeavoured to squeeze himself through the port-hole.

This was a work of some difficulty, for Tom was not a small man.

However, illness, fortunately, had sufficiently thinned him to allow of the accomplishment of his desire.

He stood without in the chains—the water below and the hull above him.

He was free!

Yet before him stood almost certain death.

Could he reach the English ships unscathed by shot?

No matter.

Life without liberty was nothing.

He plunged in the green waters, and struck boldly for the nearest English ship.

The action soon after ceased, or nearly so, and it was rapidly becoming dark.

Tom bravely struggled on, yet a feeling of apprehension stole into his heart, lest the darkness should descend ere he had been seen from the ships; and he made superhuman efforts to lessen the distance between him and succour.

His strength was deserting him.

He knew he could not swim the distance.

Oh! if he could but attract the attention of some one on board those victorious ships.

Darker and darker it became, and weaker and feebler Tom's struggles.

Involuntarily the image of Snowdrop recurred to his memory!

He saw her, in fancy, beckoning him forward.

Suddenly a shout burst from the vessel towards which Tom was swimming.

He heard it.

A flash of joy ran through his bosom.

He was seen!

They would save him!

Still buffeting with the waves, he saw nothing; his sight was dim, but his sense of hearing was painfully acute.

He heard the dip of oars—the voices of men encouraging each other to exertion.

Nearer and nearer it came.

Now he can distinguish the words that are uttered, and the sound of the water as it recoils from the driving prow.

He feels a strong hand clutch hold of his hair.

He is lifted out of the water.

He knows no more.

He has swooned!

"My eyes!" ejaculated one of the boatmen, "he was all but gone."

"Yes, there's no mistake about that. If we had been the turning of a handspike later, he would have gone to Davy Jones, as sure as my name's Ben Rollock."

"Ay, that he would."

Tom Starling was in the hands now of rough nurses—men who, with hard, horny hands, and bronzed and blackened features, possessed hearts far more generous and tender than many who boasted a silkier manner and softer form.

While some pulled back towards their ship, the rest betook themselves to performing the good offices that their sympathy suggested, and sought to restore the overwrought frame of Tom Starling to life again.

He soon opened his eyes, and with a sigh murmured,—

"Where have I grounded to now, messmate?"

"May I be tarred and feathered if he ain't an Englishman," said one of the good samaritans.

"English! ay, that I am," said Tom, who, rapidly recovering his faculties, had overheard the last remark. "English to the backbone."

"But you're not in the fleet, are you?" said Ben Rollock, "seeing that you came from that direction."

"No. I was prisoner on board a Frenchman. I managed to escape through one of the port-holes. And here I am, thanks to you, messmates."

"Oh, no thanks to us. We only does our duty, you know."

They now reached the ship's side, and, clambering up the chains, they soon arrive on deck.

The officer in command, after questioning Tom as to his antecedents and calling, then said,—

"What say you to join this ship's crew, eh?"

Tom looked up and smiled.

"Come, what say you? Plenty of prize-money and glory. Will you serve his Gracious Majesty, the King?"

"Well, I've no particular objection; seeing that I've lost my ship, and am cast away out of my bearings."

"Spoken like a true British tar!" said the captain. "Such men as you are the sort we want."

Tom touched his forelock in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Go to the forecastle, and tell the boatswain to rate you as A.B."

Tom, again saluting the captain, went for'ard, and in a few moments his name was entered in the ship's books as an able-bodied seaman in his Majesty's navy.

The next morning the fleet again stood under canvas, and went on its way rejoicing.

There were no vessels carrying the tricolour flag in sight.

The victory of the previous day was complete and decisive.

Another day passed, and the fleet again set sail through that romantic and classic sea, whose shores teem with the relics of a glorious and immortal race.

The port of Marseilles is reached, and though no opposition is expected from the forts, yet, by way of precaution, the ships of war anchor abreast of them, ready to bombard at the slightest sign of resistance.

The transports then approached the quay.

A scene of extraordinary excitement followed.

The populace rushed down to the water's edge, holding out their arms with wild gesticulations of welcome.

They were a wretched lot.

The horrors of war and pillage had fallen with tenfold weight upon the unhappy inhabitants of that town.

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And want, grim and gaunt, stared them in the face.

To England they had long looked for succour.

It had come at last.

Yet, oh, how tardy!

Tom Starling had been told off to do duty on board the transports, and, of course, was actively engaged in unshipping the various loads.

Towards night, he and two of his messmates obtained leave to go ashore, though it was against the express orders of the admiral.

But the officer in charge of the transport was young and inexperienced, so Tom and his messmates easily obtained the desired boon.

They were bent on mischief, as sailors generally are when allowed ashore.

Being well armed, they felt no fear; like Englishmen, they trusted in a stout arm and a stout heart.

The streets were wretchedly paved; in fact, they were broken up through the various struggles that had taken place between the Royalists and the Republicans.

Tom and his companions gave vent to their dissatisfaction at tumbling and floundering about in thorough English oaths.

They had threaded several narrow streets without seeing anything to excite their attention, and were beginning to feel regret that they had ventured into such a dull and dismal city, when they were startled by a loud shriek.

"Signals of distress, by Jove!" exclaimed Tom, drawing his cutlass, and breaking into a trot towards the direction from whence the sound proceeded.

His mates followed, eager and delighted at the prospect of a fray.

Turning the corner of a street, they found themselves in a square, across which, in the faint light of the street-lantern, they could see the indistinct forms of human beings.

Another shriek sounded, and they felt no doubt as to where it proceeded from.

Rushing accross the square, they soon came up with the party from amongst whom the screams emanated.

It was a woman in the midst of four men.

They were dragging her forcibly along, and evidently contrary to her wishes.

"Avast there!" shouted Tom, knocking down the nearest with the flat of his cutlass. "What are you overhauling that ere craft in that fashion for, you cowardly lubbers, eh?"

"Give it 'em, Tom!" cried that individual's companions.

The woman, with a cry of joy, tore herself from the hold of those by whom she was surrounded, and, rushing towards Tom Starling, she exclaimed,—

"Save me, noble sir! I perceive that you are an Englishman. Save me! I am thy countrywoman!"

"Save you!" exclaimed Tom. "Lord love you, they shan't hurt a hair of your precious head. No, I'm damn'd if they shall!"

"Bless you, bless you," murmured the woman, in grateful accents.

There was no time for further words.

The man Tom had knocked down had regained his feet, and with his companions rushed upon Tom and his mates.

It was four to three.

But that was nothing to sailors; they could not fight half so well if the odds were not against them.

"Aye, come on, you cowardly mounseers, for by your lingo I should say that you were nothing else."

A fierce contest now took place.

Sparks flashed from the contending swords as steel struck steel, and the breath of the combatants came hot and fast as their efforts to conquer each other increased.

The woman stood apart behind Tom, watching with painful yet intense interest the issue of the combat.

The two companions of Tom had, in the course of the struggle, strayed some yards from Tom, who for a time had withstood the attack of two on him at once.

They now suddenly returned, and ere the two sailors could overtake them, had concentrated their force with the intention of bearing down Tom at once.

Bravely, nobly did he withstand their torrent of attacks.

But he was too hard pressed.

Suddenly he recollected that he was armed with pistols.

With a cry of triumph he leapt back, dropped his cutlass, and in an instant pointed the muzzle of a pistol in each hand towards the heads of his nearest foes.

At the same time the two sailors rejoined Tom, and remembering that they also possessed pistols, pointed their dreaded weapons at the head of the rest.

An exclamation of rage and fear burst from their lips as they saw themselves thus foiled.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Tom; "you're done, that's certain."

Then, in a stern tone, he added,—

"Now, off with you, you piratical shore-hugging lubbers, or I'll send you to Davy Jones. You cowardly land-sharks, four of you on this poor little craft—shame on you!"

"Sacre!" exclaimed the man whom Tom had first knocked down. "This is too much. Accursed Anglais, begone! Cross not my path, or——"

And in spite of the pistol Tom still held extended towards him, he rushed forward.

Tom's resolve was unshaken.

He stood immovable.

As the man dashed forward, he pulled the trigger.

The report of the discharged pistol echoed round the square, and with a deep groan of anguish and rage, the man sunk to the earth heavily.

The rest, fearing the same fate, with bitter imprecations turned and fled, leaving the sailors masters of the field.

Turning to the woman, Tom exclaimed,—

"And now, my sweet little countrywoman, what's your commands? They're clean gone, excepting this poor devil here," he added, giving the wounded man a slight kick.

The poor wretch gave a groan of pain as Tom's foot touched him.

"Hullo!" said Tom, "he's not dead yet. Well, damn it, we won't leave him in distress, though he's a cowardly son of a sea-cook. Come on, mates, hoist him on your shoulders and we'll bear him to port."

"Aye, aye, Tom; we'll show the lubber what stuff English hearts are made of."

So saying, they lifted the wounded and insensible man from the ground, and hurried away from the square, followed by Tom, who was partly leading and partly supporting the woman whom they had rescued.

It was time they did beat a retreat, for the inhabitants of the vicinity were gradually arousing from their apathy.

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The noise of clashing swords was certainly not uncommon in the city, but the shrieks of the woman, and the voices of men, succeeded by the report of the pistol, was a trifle beyond their usual experience of street rows.

Accordingly, several persons rapidly approached the place, just as Tom and his messmates had left it.

Hurrying through the wretched streets, the sailors made for the quay, intending to call on some of their messmates to come ashore and assist them, for they felt that it would not be safe to enter any house without they had a sufficient force to repel treachery.

But they soon discovered that they had mistaken or forgotten their way.

"Curse these narrow, winding alleys!" said Tom, when the fact became apparent. "We shall be nabbed after all."

"To my thinking," said one of the sailors, "we came up that way," pointing up another miserable-looking street that lay in a contrary direction to that in which they were going.

"Well," says the other, "that's my opinion of the matter."

"Then go ahead," says Tom. "If two of you think the same it must be right."

Accordingly, they turned into the street indicated.

"It's infernal dry, travelling in this ere dusty, chalky city," said Tom.

"Yes," said one of his mates; "I should like to come athwart a can of grog now, anyhow."

As if in answer to their wishes, they came suddenly upon an open house, ostensibly professing to supply refreshments and wines to wayfarers and travellers.

Without a moment's hesitation our jolly tars entered, and called for the best the house offered.

The landlord was obsequiously civil.

An ill-looking vagabond he was, nevertheless.

Tom and his friends were invited to sit down in the parlour, or sitting-room.

The woman at first strongly objected.

But Tom would not be said nay, and so she reluctantly yielded.

Several men were lounging about when they entered, and as the inanimate form of the wounded man was brought in, looks of surprise and curiosity passed between them.

It was, indeed, imprudent of Tom and his mates to enter here.

But who ever knew a true British tar to act with prudence.

Unwittingly they entered a house situated in the worst part of the town, far from the point they had desired to reach.

And notorious as was the character of the house in the city, it was far worse now that law and order were at a discount.

As soon as the liquor came before them, the sailors forgot all about their ship and the late affray, and became jolly to their heart's content.

In vain the woman besought them to leave the place, for, though a stranger in the town, she saw the sinister looks and mysterious goings in and out of the men in the cabaret, and doubted not that it presaged mischief of some kind to herself and those who had befriended her.

But nothing could move them from their settled purpose.

They were anchored now, and be damned if they'd weigh for the biggest admiral in the whole world.

In the meantime, on the pretence of charity and kindness, the landlord succeeded in persuading them to place the wounded man on a bed in another apartment, and give up the care of him to his wife and daughter.

Believing this to be genuine, the sailors readily gave up all further thought or care as regards their late foe.

Tired and worn out, the woman, finding it useless to attempt to change the purpose of her friends, sat silent and sad, till her eyelids closed in sleep.

Not long after Tom and his messmates, under the influence of the drink they had imbibed, yielded to the insinuation of sleep also.

Watchful eyes were upon them.

The moment that the deep and sonorous nasal sounds of the tars confirmed the impression of those who heard how sound their sleep was, they advanced.

Stealthily and catlike they approached the unconscious sailors.

Silently yet hastily they produced some strong cord, with which they proceeded to bind the helpless tars.

So soundly did they sleep that they were securely tied without the slightest signs of awakening.

That accomplished, they next proceeded to the woman.

She still slept.

One of the villains held a torch that he carried in such a manner as to throw a light on the woman's face.

She was young, beautiful, yet pallid, as if with suffering or alarm.

"Umph!" muttered one. "Our captain's not got a bad taste, as he, comrades?"

"No, no; she is beautiful!"

The light playing over her features awakened her.

In an instant she was broad awake, and comprehended at once the situation of herself and those who had defended her.

A look of fear and alarm was in her glance as she gazed round in the hope that something might occur to rescue her.

Vain hope!

A shriek burst from her lips.

Ere she could repeat it a gag was thrust into her mouth, and they attempted to hurry her from the room.

But her cry, though only uttered once, had aroused Tom and his mates, and in attempting to rise they, of course, to their intense astonishment, found that they lay helpless and bound on the floor.

"Split my topsail, if we ain't caught in a trap!" exclaimed Tom Starling to his mates, as he became wide awake, and saw the dilemma they were in.

With tremendous exertions they writhe and struggle on the floor, in the hope of loosening their bonds.

One of the sailors did succeed at last in getting an arm free.

To seize the knife hanging from his belt was the work of an instant.

Ere their captors had recovered from their surprise at beholding one at liberty, he cut the cords that bound the man beside him, and would have rendered the same assistance to Tom; but fate had willed it otherwise.

He was in the act of bending over Tom.

The villains by this time had recovered their surprise, and, with a cry of savage rage, they rushed upon the unfortunate sailor.

Before he could turn and face the miscreants their poniards had pierced his back, and he fell without a groan to the floor a corpse.

"Blast ye, for a cowardly crew!" shouted the other man, as they sprung upon him.

He grappled and wrestled with them; but it was useless.

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There were too many, and stab after stab was dealt on his body, till senseless and bleeding he, too, fell a victim to his cowardly murderers.

Tom Starling looked on in agony.

To see his comrades slaughtered before his eyes, and he not able to lift a finger in their defence, filled him with grief and rage.

The prospect of imminent death caused him no uneasiness.

All his thoughts were absorbed in the desire to avenge his messmates' massacre.

The unfortunate woman who had been unwittingly the cause of these misfortunes, had happily sunk into insensibility.

The sight of horror had stopped for a time the current of her heart's blood.

Gloating and exultant, satiated with the blood they had shed, the miscreants turned towards Tom.

He doubted not but that his turn to die had arrived.

He closed his eyes.

A sweet face haunted him.

It was Snowdrop's!

With the rapidity of lightning the scenes of his early life passed in mental review before him.

The struggle across the filthy waters that Hamet had let loose with the intention of overwhelming him, came vividly to his recollection, and again the sad pale face of Snowdrop stood beyond—beckoning him across.

He felt in imagination the water surge up towards his throat, and carry him off his feet.

A choking sensation followed.

He stretched forth his hand to reach Snowdrop, but her image faded away in the darkness—black, awful darkness.

Was this death?

He opened his eyes.

The murderers still stood over him.

Why did they not end his miseries at once?

Cruel and barbarous fiends to prolong his suspense thus.

Suddenly a loud knocking was heard at the door!

The men looked from one to the other in consternation.

The knocking was repeated, louder and with more impatience, accompanied with voices shouting in threatening tones.

The murderers still stood motionless.

A noise like something heavy and ponderous hurled against the door, which they knew to be the butt ends of several muskets, simultaneously thrust, in battering-ram fashion, against the panels.

A crash followed, and the door fell, splintered and torn from its hinges into the passage.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE TRANSPORT SHIP—THE CAPTURE—MEETING OF SIR MILES CRESSINGHAM AND HERBERT MANDEVILLE—THE DUEL—DEATH OF LIEUTENANT JOHNSON.

The morning light lifted the darkness from the sea, and revealed in all its horrors the fearful carnage on board the unfortunate transport ship.

So bloody and desperate had been the affray, that at least two thirds of those who had composed the ship's freight lay dead or dying.

Herbert Mandeville was well-nigh distracted, and together with the Marquis of Bridgnorth, looked on in dumb despair.

But though all efforts on their part had failed to allay the demoniac passion that swayed the belligerent parties, a common danger threatening them, which the daylight revealed, at once accomplished it, and mutually and tacitly every man dropped his arm, and retired some paces away.

What was it?

It was the ship that had troubled them throughout the night.

The French colours were flying at her masthead.

The fear of a French prison acted like magic, and every man silently resumed his post.

With a look of hatred at Herbert and the marquis, Lieutenant Johnson, foiled in his attempt to load them in irons, and alarmed at the consequences of his foolhardy exhibition of passion, turned his anxious glances towards the ship, which lay about a mile and a half off his starboard quarter.

It was a well-built and trimly-rigged bark, and the lieutenant had no difficulty in perceiving that she carried a goodly tier of barkers, together with a good complement of hands to serve them.

Bitterly he cursed his folly as he looked at his own thinned ranks, and deeply resolved was he to wreak a deadly revenge on the cause of it, namely, Herbert Mandeville.

But he had no time to mature or even invent plans for the accomplishment of his vengeance.

A shot from the dreaded ship came dancing through the main sheets, politely intimating that they must bring to, or a broadside would quickly follow.

They now prepared for action in downright earnest.

Whether the lieutenant intended it or not, the officers had determined to resist falling into the hands of the Frenchman at any hazard.

So the command was given, and the transport's helm was turned towards the attacking vessel.

All was hurry and bustle, wretchedness and disaster.

The decks were slippery with blood, and the bodies strewn around impeded the movements of the defenders of the transport.

But with dogged resolution the men proceeded about their duty, and the soldiers stripped off the encumbrous part of their dress, and joined them in manning the guns.

As they neared the hostile bark, a broadside was poured full into them, smashing the bulkheads, and knocking down several of the men.

A yell of rage burst from those on board the transport, and with a cheer they ran out the guns, and returned their fire.

But it did little or no damage to the enemy.

Their haste and impetuosity rendered their aim abortive.

Again they receive the stranger's broadside with the same destructive effect, and one shot sent the mainmast overboard, which, in its descent, took the mizen-top down with it.

A fearful scene of confusion ensued.

All hands were compelled to quit the guns, and cut away with hatchets and knives the rigging that entangled the ship, and threatened to swamp her.

Whole seas swept over her larboard gunwale, and she was rapidly filling with water

When at last they succeeded in freeing the ship from the lumber, she righted, but lay like a log on the water, a perfect wreck.

She was quite unmanageable.

It was useless to prolong the contest.

She refused to obey her helm, and consequently they could not get her broadside to bear on their enemy.

Despair was on every face.

Suddenly the strange ship hauled down her colours.

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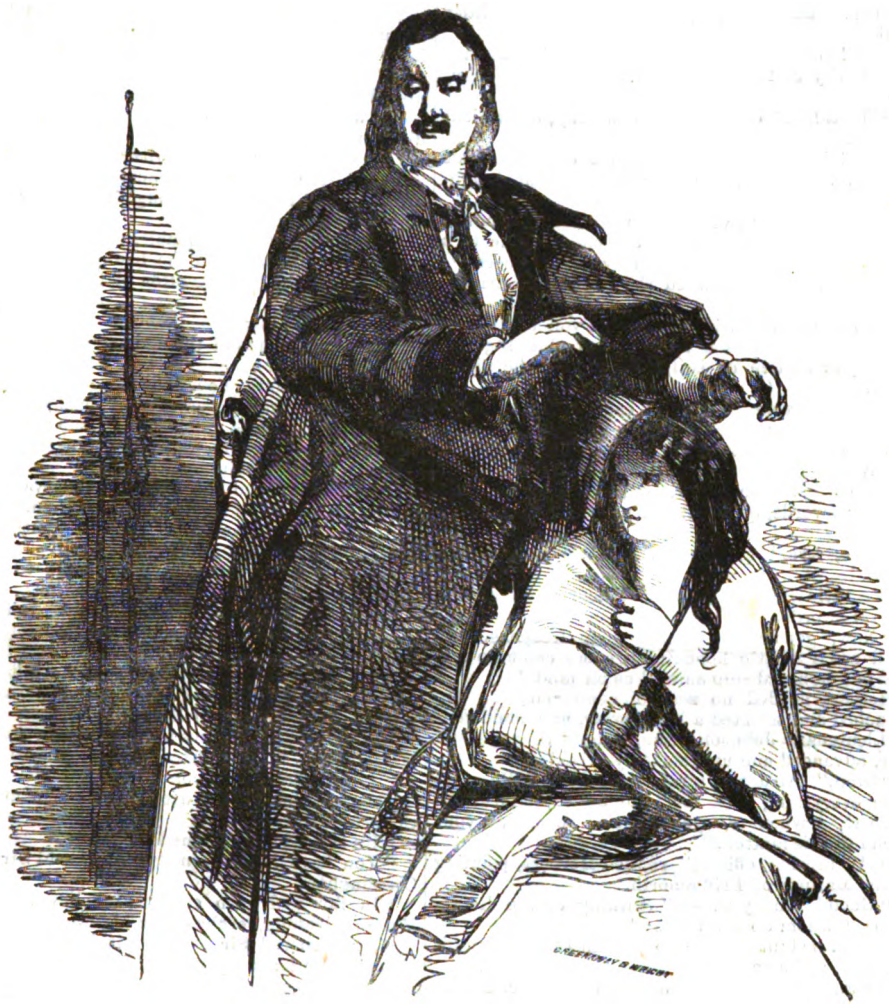

THE BLESSING.

Those on board the transport looked at each other in surprise.

What could it mean?

Had she struck her colours in token of defeat?

Faint as the hope was, it was dashed aside in an instant, for, ere they had time to ask, another flag was run up to the masthead.

A cry of surprise ran through those who beheld it.

It was the black flag!

A few more moments passed, and then the pirate steered full into the thwarts of the transport ship.

A shock, that sent every one off their feet, followed by a fearful crash, succeeded.

The transport was cut clean in half, and parted in midship.

Some score of the crew leaped into the pirate vessel, and a bloody conflict—hand to hand—took place.

But numbers told against them, and all who resisted were slaughtered.

As the wrecked vessel filled and gradually sank, the remainder of those on board were picked up by the pirate crew.

But few, indeed, were left of that company that left England so recently with such high hopes, and such fond dreams, perhaps, of glory and renown.

In a little while Herbert Mandeville and the Marquis of Bridgenorth, Lieutenant Johnson and the remaining officers of the ship, were conducted towards the quarter-deck, where the captain awaited them

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"Holloa, my hearties!" exclaimed the captain. "I've caught some fine birds, I see."

"And what have you gained by the capture?" inquired Herbert, sarcastically.

"In truth, not much, I fear!"

"Then, why did you attack us?"

"Oh! just to teach your captain to be a little civil."

"Ah! he needs it," said Herbert, looking reproachfully and menacingly at Lieutenant Johnson.

"'Tis a lie!" ejaculated that worthy, in a violent passion.

"Ah! is that the language of a captain of his Majesty's navy?" cried the pirate captain, laughing.

"Had I but my sword, and a few feet of English soil, I would show the bully the conduct due to a gentleman and an officer," sternly said Herbert.

"And I, too," ejaculated the Marquis of Bridgenorth.

"Then, by my faith, gentlemen, you shall have your desire—that is if a few feet of planking will serve you in lieu of soil," exclaimed the pirate chief.

"I accept your proposal," eagerly replied Herbert. "For my soul burns to avenge the insult heaped on it by that man."

"What ho!" shouted the pirate, turning towards those of his own crew, who stood near him. "Bring swords, quick; there's sport for us now," said he.

"Aye, aye," answered the ready and willing crew.

In a little while they returned, bearing with them several swords.

"Now, gentlemen, choose your weapons, and we'll see if a little honourable sport can't be carried out on board ship as well as on land."

Herbert needed no second command; he approached and selected a long rapier, and handed it to Lieutenant Johnson, who, pale with rage and fear, advanced and ungraciously seized it.

"Stop," cried the pirate captain. "We must have everything fair, sir," he added, addressing Herbert, "whom do you appoint to act as your friend in this matter?"

"My brother officer," replied Herbert, pointing to the Marquis of Bridgenorth.

"Good! And you, sir" (turning to the lieutenant), "whom do you name?"

For an instant a look of perplexity played on his features, as he gazed abstractedly around him.

He was about to speak, when a voice from behind was heard to utter, in deep tones,—

"I will!"

Every eye turned in surprise.

An exclamation of astonishment burst from Herbert's lips as he beheld a tall form advance, with arms folded across his breast and a scowl of hate and defiance on his brow.

It was Sir Miles Cressingham!

"Sir Miles Cressingham! You here!" murmured Herbert.

"Aye, the same. You seem somewhat surprised," replied Sir Miles, with a sneer.

It was, indeed, Sir Miles, and the ship was none other than the smuggler of the Blackwater.

Circumstances connected with the war had changed their intention, and as a privateer they intended or hoped to gain more plunder than otherwise.

Letters of marque they had none, consequently they were really and ostensibly pirates.

"Now," said the pirate captain, "all's settled; let the sport begin."

Accordingly the preliminaries were gone through that were usually observed by those who professed to adhere to the code of honour, and the seconds retiring a few paces, the combat or duel began.

To say that Herbert was prompted by a feeling of revenge or hate, would be wronging his noble nature.

The feeling paramount within him was that of wounded selfhood, and in accordance with the feeling of the time, he believed nothing but blood could eradicate the stain he believed was now cast upon his name.

But with Lieutenant Johnson the case was widely different.

Low in his instincts and culture, he was but little removed from the poor, ignorant wretches that crowded the forecastle, though in point of heart they were superior to him.

Hate, deadly and inexpiable, possessed his soul, and in spite of the fear he had of death, he advanced with the full intention of taking Herbert's life.

Their swords met.

The requirdments of the age had caused each to be an expert swordsman, so that neither possessed any undue advantage over the other.

Slowly and warily passes were exchanged, and none appeared more interested in the result than Sir Miles Cressingham, who watched every manœuvre with intense excitement.

"Ah!" exclaimed the pirate, "that was a good point; by heaven, he nearly had you then."

Herbert still played with extreme caution, and provokingly parried every thrust, till Johnson's patience became exhausted, and unable to control his temper, he became wild and incautious.

Presently Herbert, seizing his opportunity, run his sword right through the unfortunate lieutenant's body.

So forcible was the thrust that the hilt struck against the unfortunate man's breast-bone, and the warm blood gushed over Herbert's wrist.

With a groan of agony the dying man stood an instant erect, and with fixed and glazed eyes looked unutterable hate at his conqueror.

Then sinking on the deck, he lay stiff and motionless.

"He is dead!" exclaimed the pirate.

"You have killed him!" fiercely said Sir Miles Cressingham.

"In fair and open combat, I believe?" replied Herbert, leaning carelessly on his sword.

"Sir!" roared Sir Miles, "it is my turn, now. You owe me some reparation, and by hell I'll have it!"

And stooping over the dead lieutenant, Sir Miles seized the sword from his nerveless grasp.

"Now, then, if you are not a coward, defend yourself."

"Sir Miles, I told you before that I would never cross swords with one who is a villain—aye, a murderer."

"Liar!"

"Avast!" shouted the pirate. "What's in the wind now? No sooner one duel settled than another springs up. Sir Miles, you must treat my guests with a little civility, or I shall have to order you below."

"He has thwarted me," cried Sir Miles, "insulted, aye, and struck me. Heard'st thou not even now that he called me a murderer?"

"Well, I suppose you must fight it out."

Thus pushed to extremities, there was no alternative.

Sir Miles rushed on, and Herbert was compelled to put out his sword in self-defence.

Fierce and hot waged the combat between these two deadly foes.

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Some time elapsed without any decided advantage occurring to either party.

But eventually, it happened, unfortunately for Herbert.

In moving round his adversary he trod in the pool of blood that had flowed from the lieutenant's body, and in stepping back to avoid and parry a thrust, his foot slipped, and ere he could recover himself Sir Miles's sword passed through the fleshy part of his sword-arm, just above the elbow.

With a yell of joy Sir Miles drew his sword from the wound and prepared to run him through the body.

Seeing Sir Miles Cressingham's savage intention, the Marquis of Bridgenorth rushed forward, and catching the sword that fell from Herbert's hand, parried the intended thrust, and stood on the defensive before the baffled and enraged baronet.

"Now, sir," said the marquis, mildly, "you will please to render me some satisfaction for your attack on my friend."

"You! Who the devil are you that come between me and my vengeance? Away, I say, thou meddling, prating fool!"

The marquis made no answer, but stood immoveable before Herbert Mandeville, who was endeavouring to stanch the blood that flowed from his wound.

"Is Sir Miles a coward as well as a bully?" at last inquired the marquis.

"Damnation!" exclaimed Sir Miles, "I'm always thwarted thus."

Then, mad with rage, he blindly and savagely attacked the marquis.

After a few passes the marquis succeeded in dexterously jerking Sir Miles's sword from his grasp, and he stood defenceless before him.

"Foiled again!" murmured Sir Miles, fully expecting his death blow now.

But the noble marquis turned contemptuously away.

"Sir Miles," he said, "my honour is satisfied. I scorn to take so mean a life. Live, and, if you can, repent."

For a moment Sir Miles Cressingham stood petrified with mortification and rage, gazing at the marquis and Herbert Mandeville, as they slowly walked to another part of the deck.

"Captain," hoarsely muttered Sir Miles, turning to the pirate chief, "I will join your crew, if you will give me a commission. Only let me have them entirely in my power, and I am your's for ever."

"Agreed! your hand on't."

"There it is."

The pirate chief seized the baronet's hand, and gave it a grip that made him wince.

"Henceforth you shall be my lieutenant."

"I accept the office."

"Ho! there. Pipe all hands aboard!" shouted the pirate.

The whistle sounded, and soon afterwards the men came running on deck.

"Come aft, all of you."

"Aye, aye, sir!" sang out numerous voices.

In a brief interval the quarter-deck was crowded by the pirate crew.

"My lads," began the captain, "I've sent for you to introduce a new officer to you."

"Hear! hear!"

"Henceforth you will obey all the commands of Lieutenant Cressingham, as you would me. He is the second officer of the ship."

"Hurrah!" cried the men.

"You may go down to the steward and tell him to give you a bucket of grog."

"Hurrah!" again shouted the men, as they hastily dispersed.

A look of triumph beamed in Sir Miles Cressingham's eyes as he strode from the side of him he had now bound himself to obey as captain, and walked towards Herbert and his friend the Marquis of Bridgenorth.

As they turned round at the sound of his approaching footsteps, he hissed through his teeth,—

"At last I have you in my power; henceforth you baffle me no more!"

A look of supreme contempt was the only notice that Herbert deigned to bestow on Sir Miles, and he was about to resume his conversation with his friend the marquis, when Sir Miles Cressingham interrupted them.

"Herbert Mandeville, I command you to retire below. You are a prisoner!"

"I have yet to learn," replied Herbert, haughtily, "how to obey the commands of a villain."

"Retire, instantly, sir; or I'll have you whipped down like a hound," said Sir Miles fiercely.

"You?"

"Yes—I."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Herbert. "To hear you rave, one would think that you were captain of this accursed bark."

Almost choked with passion, Sir Miles approached so close that Herbert felt his breath on his face, and raising his finger in a menacing attitude, he said, in hoarse and measured tones,—

"Listen! To wreak my vengeance on you, I have sacrificed my honour—"

"Ha! ha!" interrupted Herbert. "Honour!"

"Aye, sneer on; it's my turn presently. Well, I sacrificed the semblance of honour, if you like that better, and risked a pirate's doom, to become the second officer of this ship; that, mark me, I might hold thee in my power. I have succeeded. I am second in command. Again I say retire."

As he finished a look of ineffable triumph glowed in his savage and cruel eyes.

"Villain!" exclaimed Herbert, astonished and dismayed, for he well knew what he might hope from so relentless a foe.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Marquis of Bridgenorth, who had listened, surprised and incensed. "Is it possible so foul a monster ever mingled in the society of English gentlemen?"

Without heeding the marquis, Sir Miles again raised his finger, and addressing Herbert in a tone of command, said,—

"Retire!"

"Come on," said Herbert to his friend; "let us quit the presence of so deep-dyed a villain."

Sir Miles interposed,—

"Nay! I cannot permit your friend to accompany you; 'twould be too great a boon. No, no; your friend may go where he list. 'Tis thou that I want."

"This is too much!" exclaimed the Marquis of Bridgenorth. "By my knighthood I'll not submit any longer to such insolence. Away," he continued excitedly, attempting to push past Sir Miles Cressingham, "away out of our path, or by heaven I'll strike thee to the deck."

"Ah! dare you threaten me here?" exclaimed Sir Miles. "Ho! there."

And Sir Miles beckoned to several of the ex-smugglers, but now pirates, to come forward.

"Seize those martinets! Load him with chains, and place him in the deepest hold," he continued, pointing to Herbert. "As for the other, give him a ducking if he resists."

"Aye, aye, yer honour!"

But thoroughly roused to a bitter sense of the injustice they were subjected to, Herbert and the marquis determined to resist or perish in the attempt.

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They had no arms but those nature had furnished them.

With a well-directed blow full in the face Herbert knocked the first seaman down.

The second shared the same fate from the fist of the marquis, and together they stood, prepared and ready to inflict the same punishment on the next who approached.

Sir Miles gnashed his teeth with rage.

Two more of the pirates licked the deck in the same manner.

"Damnation!" cried Sir Miles. "Are you all children, that you let two youngsters knock you down like ninepins?"

More of the crew now came flocking to the scene, and at last, under the pressure of numbers, Herbert and the marquis were borne down to the deck.

"Bind them with cords!" shouted the now delighted Sir Miles.

They were about to obey this order, when they were all startled by a loud and defiant cheer, followed by the trampling of several feet.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE HONOURABLE CAPEL FAWCETT—THE PLOT—THE SURPRISE—THE TABLES TURNED.

During the progress of the duel that had terminated so fatally for Lieutenant Johnson, the soldiers and sailors that had survived the attack on the transport had been conveyed below.

Among them was the Honourable Capel Fawcett, who, by some accident or other, had been separated from his brother officers.

But in spite of his position his excellent flow of spirits never deserted him, and his mirth-exciting jests and sayings contributed materially to lighten the sufferings of his fellow-prisoners, for the pirates, like most sailors, dearly loved a joke and a story, and treated them less harshly than they would otherwise have done.

It was while the duel lasted that they were for the time left alone, curiosity having prompted the piratical crew to go on deck and see the fight.

The moment they had left them Capel changed his mien to one of deep seriousness.

"Comrades," he whispered, "we have fallen into a nest of pirates, and I for one mean to try and get out of it."

"How?" cried several.

"How? why by a little stratagem and a little fighting, I suppose."

"But we have no arms," again said several.

"Bah! what of that—can't we get some? Look here, are you all of one mind?"

The men looked at one another.

"Are you willing to risk your lives on the chance of escape, or do you prefer to submit to whatever the tender mercies of our captors may choose to ordain?"

"No, no. Let us escape if we can, or die in the attempt."

"Spoken like brave Englishmen!" said Capel, enthusiastically.

Then looking round, as if mentally calculating the chances, he said,—

"If we obtain arms, I do not think we shall be at much disadvantage; for if I am not mistaken the crew of this vessel does not far outnumber us. But let me impress one thing on you all—that is extreme caution and secrecy."

"We will—we will!" echoed several voices.

At this moment the call of the boatswain was heard.

It was when the captain had ordered the men to assemble to be introduced to their new lieutenant.

Soon after Capel and his fellow-prisoners assumed the various careless attitudes they had observed when the pirates left them, for they had heard their cheers and hastily descending feet on the stairs.

As they entered nothing appeared to excite their suspicion, and, full of rough glee, they related the incidents that had occurred on deck, together with the last, and to them most important, command of the captain, namely, the grog to be distributed to them.

When the steaming liquor was brought in, all fell to with a will; and, in the exuberance of their rough and jolly hearts, they invited the prisoners to partake of their hospitality.

"Come on, my lads," cried Bill, who was always the foremost, "and splice the main brace."

At a sign from Capel the men drank sparingly, though pretending to drink deep.

The pirates, on the other hand, went heart and soul into the revelry.

"Here's to our new leftenant," said Bill. "May he prove a staunch and brave officer to our noble captain."

Loud cheers followed, as the men stood up and drained their pannikins to the toast.

"A song!" shouted several. "Give us a song, Bill!"

"A song, mates; bother you, you know I'm no hand at that. My pipes are out o' tune for that sort o' thing. Let some younger chap chirp out a bit."

"Oh! nonsense, Bill," replied several. "Come, tip us a stave."

"Well, then, if I must, here goes."

After a good draught of grog by way of clearing his throat, as he called it, he struck up, in stentorian voice, the following lines of the immortal Dibdin:—

"A plague on those musty old lubbers,
Who teach us to fast and to think,
And patient fall in with life's rubbers,
With nothing but water to drink.
A can of good stuff, had they twigged it,
Would have set them for pleasure agog,
And spite of the rules
Of the schools, the old fools
Would all of 'em swigged it,
And swore there was nothing like grog.

"My father, when last I from Guinea
Returned with abundance of wealth,
Cried, 'Jack, never be such a ninny
To drink.' Says I, 'Father, your health.'
So I passed round the stuff (soon he twigg'd it),
And it set the old codger agog;
And he swigg'd, and mother,
And sister, and brother,
And I swigg'd, and all of us swigged it,
And swore there was nothing like grog.

"One day, when the chaplain was preaching,
Behind him I cautiously slunk;
And while he our duty was teaching,
As how we should never get drunk;
I tipped him the stuff, and he twigged it,
Which soon set his rev'rence agog.
And he swigged, and Nick swigged,
And Ben swigged, and Dick swigged,
And I swigged, and all of us swigged it,
And swore there was nothing like grog.

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"Then, trust me, there's nothing like drinking,
So pleasant on this side the grave;
It keeps the unhappy from thinking,
And makes e'en the valiant more brave.
For me, from the moment I twigged it,
The good stuff has so set me agog—
Sick or well, late or early,
Wind foully or fairly,
I've constantly swigged it, and swigged it,
And, damme! there's nothing like grog."

After repeating the chorus with astonishing energy, the company loudly applauded Bill's performance, remarking that they knew he could blow his pipes as well as any of them.

"Well," said Bill, "since you've made me begin, I think its my privilege to demand another from who I like."

"Bravo, Bill; pass it on."

"Well, perhaps the gentleman yonder will give us a stave?"

All eyes were turned towards Capel, to whom Bill had alluded.

"I never sang in my life," replied Capel, when he understood that they expected him to sing a song.

"Well, spin us a yarn; you can do that well enough."

"A yarn?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll try."

"Hurrah! order for a yarn."

"Once upon a time," began Capel, "there lived in a distant land, a man of the name of Achmet. He was greatly feared by all who knew him, and consequently he had many enemies, who tried on all occasions to injure him. But with all their scheming and art, they could never reach him. He stood so high—"

"Oh! that be bothered for a damned lie," ejaculated one.

"Sir!" said Capel.

"Well, how could a man be so high that none could reach him?"

"Why, you old fool," said Bill, "if he got up the maintop he'd be high enough, wouldn't he?"

"Oh! aye. I beg yer honour's pardon; I didn't think of that."

"I was about to say," continued Capel, "that he stood so high in his sovereign's estimation, that all their wiles proved abortive, only you interrupted me."

At that moment they heard the scuffle on deck between Herbert and his friend and the sailors that Sir Miles had ordered to seize them.

A rush was instantly made up the companion ladder, and again Capel and his fellow-prisoners were left alone.

Prompted by curiosity, Capel cautiously stepped up the companion ladder and peeped on deck.

There he saw at once that his brother officers were in peril.

In a moment he had decided on his course of action.

The time had arrived, though not as he could have wished.

But when friends were in danger, prudence must necessarily be cast to the winds.

Hastily descending, he at once communicated to the transport men the position of affairs.

The pirates in their drunken revelry had laid aside many of their weapons, and in their hurry to reach the deck had not resumed them.

These, therefore, were seized upon by Capel and his men, and shared as far as they would go.

The rest laid hold of whatever they could find that would serve as a weapon.

"Now, then," said Capel, "follow me!"

"All right, sir; we are ready."

"Right about face, then—march! and till I give the word, remain silent."

Leading the way towards where he thought the gun-room and magazine would be, they proceeded with caution and in silence.

As they expected, they found it guarded by two sentinels.

But ere they could give an alarm, they were overpowered and silenced for ever.

There was now nothing to prevent them being perfectly armed; and taking as much ammunition as they could in the hurry of the moment secure, they prepared to ascend to the deck.

"Is every gun loaded?" asked Capel.

"Yes, sir."

"Then, march!"

Again Capel led the way.

They ascend the companion ladder.

Capel reaches the deck just as Herbert and the marquis are overpowered.

He is not observed!

One after the other his fellow-prisoners follow, and reach the deck beside him.

"Are all ready?" again he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Advance—charge!"

They could no longer resist the cheer that burst from their lips.

Carried away with the exciting suspense, it came spontaneous as they rushed aft.

In an instant the pirate crew start up, leaving Herbert and the Marquis free, so surprised, so startled they were.

Capel saw in a moment that his friends were not standing erect among the pirates, and seized directly the advantage.

"Present—Fire!" he shouted, pointing his arm in the direction he wished them to fire, as calm and as cool as if he had been on review.

Their shots told with deadly effect, and several of the pirates leaped high in the air mortally wounded.

In this emergency the pirate captain appeared.

Hitherto he had left Sir Miles to himself, after making him his lieutenant, and had retired to his cabin.

But the noise of firing brought him instantly on deck to learn the cause.

Great was his astonishment and wrath at finding the state of things.

Pushing Sir Miles aside, he at once issued his orders in a voice clear and distinct.

Again Capel poured another volley into their midst.

"Damnation!" roared the captain. "Are we to be slaughtered like sheep? Charge them with your pikes and swords ere they can load again!"

So saying he dashed, sword in hand, towards Capel, followed by his crew.

"Fix bayonets!" cried Capel.

The order was cheerfully obeyed, for the men began to see that they were gaining the advantage.

"Charge!"

Forward they dash.

In another moment the opposing forces met.

At the first shock several fell mortally wounded on both sides, and a terrific hand to hand conflict took place.

But the men under Capel remained steady and cool, and step by step they drove the pirate crew back.

Desperately the pirate captain fought, dealing blows furious and fast; but in spite of his daring and frantic efforts, his men were compelled to yield to the opposing force.

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Then, as a sudden idea occurred to him, he rushed back to the poop, and dragging one of the carronades, that were more looked on as ornaments than of actual use, and pointing the muzzle towards the forecastle, he cried out to his men to retreat.

Breaking suddenly from their assailants, the pirates turned and fled in the direction of their commander.

But Capel was too quick for them.

"Forward, comrades!" he shouted.

And so close did he and his men keep to the pirates, that the captain stormed with rage on perceiving the defeat of his plan.

Again the combat raged, hand to hand.

At last Capel reached the side of Herbert and the Marquis of Bridgenorth.

"My dear Herbert," he exclaimed, "you are saved! Join us, the ship is ours to a certainty."

And placing arms in the hands of both Herbert and the marquis, he rushed to the thickest of the fight.

All this time Sir Miles looked on with a kind of stupéfaction.

He could hardly credit the evidence of his senses, or believe it possible that the prisoners they had captured from the transport could make good their attempt at revolt.

But the moment he saw Herbert and the marquis join the ranks of the transport men, and thus escape from his power, all the energy of his nature became aroused.

Full of fury and disappointment he at once dashed into the fight, making straight for his hated rival.

Thoroughly disheartened, the pirates fought listlessly and careless.

One by one they fell beneath the blows of their adversaries, strewing the deck with their bleeding bodies.

There now remained but half a score round the captain, including Sir Miles.

Capel still retained the command of the expedition; Herbert and the marquis, though holding superior rank, preferring to let him carry out to the end that which he had began in so gallant a manner.

Seeing how hopeless it was for the pirates to struggle further, and wishing to spare bloodshed if possible, Capel cried out,—

"Surrender! it is useless to prolong the struggle further."

"Never!" exclaimed the pirate chief.

"Then your blood be on your own heads," solemnly said Capel. "Forward, comrades!"

Once more the struggle was renewed.

But it was of brief duration.

Capel and his companions soon succeeded in overpowering the few that remained opposed to them.

Bruised, bleeding, and exhausted, the remnant of the pirate crew were captured, and bound hand and foot; and, after a severe struggle, the captain and Sir Miles Cressingham shared the same fate.

Great was the joy of the soldiers and crew of the late transport at their success.

"Three cheers for Lieutenant Fawcett," cried out several voices.

Loud and hearty cheers was the response.

"And now, my men, we must not be too elated with our success," said Capel. "Let us rather seek to insure our position against danger or surprise. First we must navigate the ship. Who amongst ye is able to take command of the vessel?"

Several voices cried out,—

"Mr. Small, Mr. Small; he's not dead yet. He'll do."

"Very well, then. Mr. Small, you will at once commence your duties, and endeavour to carry us to port safe and sound."

"Mr. Small stepped forward, and touching his cap, replied:

"I'll do my best, lieutenant."

"That will do. And now, soldiers and marines, I expect you'll do your best likewise, and keep strict watch and guard over the prisoners, lest they in their turn should catch us napping."

All was now activity and industry, the sailors, under Mr. Small, exerted themselves to the utmost to make all taut and snug.

The bodies of the killed were consigned to the waves, and the decks well swabbed and hollystoned to obliterate all signs of the late strife.

A favouring gale blew steadily along, every sail was set, and the superior sailing qualities of the *Flower of the Desert* over the unfortunate transport filled every bosom on board with hope and contentment.

With the soldiers and marines Herbert, the marquis, and Capel exerted themselves to render them efficient in discipline and obedient to orders.

The prisoners were securely bound, and confined in different parts of the ship to prevent them communicating with each other or concerting any plan of escape.

As soon as all on board had settled down into steady and regular routine, Herbert Mandeville sought an interview with Sir Miles Cressingham.

A scowl of deadly hatred flashed from Sir Miles's eyes as he looked up to see who it was that intruded into the cabin.

"Ha! dare you come to mock me? Curse you, begone!"

"Sir Miles, I come not to mock thee, but to demand from thee the only reparation it is in your power to make. Where—where is Florence Avery? What have you done with her?"

A look of triumph beamed in Sir Miles's eyes, as he felt by the question of Herbert that Florence had not, at any rate, found out her beloved Herbert, and that it was still in his power to torture and wound the heart of his detested rival.

"Ha! ha! What know I of thy lost love?" he asked.

"Villain!" exclaimed Herbert, exasperated, "you know where she is. You, or your agents, alone tore her from her home—you. By heaven, if you tell me not where she is, or what you have done with her, I will tear the secret from thy heart, perjured and lying villain!"

"Rail on—rail on; I am in your power now. But you had better not seek to learn aught of Florence Avery. Ha! ha! ha!"

And Sir Miles laughed tauntingly.

For an instant Herbert looked full in Sir Miles's face, as if endeavouring to read his inmost soul; something in his manner, and the tone of his voice filled him with an ill-defined dread.

Suppressing with a great effort the indignation that was well-nigh choking him, Herbert said slowly and calmly,—

"Sir Miles, in a few days, perhaps in a few hours, you will be placed before a tribunal to answer the heinous charge of piracy. You must be found guilty; nothing on earth can save you—the proofs are too damning, too certain. And then death, ignoble, terrible death, awaits you. I again ask you, solemnly and earnestly, to make some little atonement for your numerous crimes, and tell me what has become of that poor, unprotected, and suffering girl?"

During this address Sir Miles's countenance was fearful to look upon.

The alternate play of passion and fear in his

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features, as Herbert proceeded, rendered him truly demoniac in appearance.

"Herbert Mandeville, your maudlin, sentimental talk may do for women, but not for me. As for your croaking prophecy, I laugh at it. Man! you don't know me. Before I die, I swear to have a deadly revenge on him who has thwarted me so long. The power of heaven or hell I'll brave to accomplish the sole end of my existence—vengeance on you, Herbert Mandeville!"

Herbert recoiled in horror.

Was it possible so black-hearted a villain could exist on the earth?

"If you escape this time, then I'll believe thee to be the devil himself," said Herbert, preparing to leave.

"Stay!" cried Sir Miles. "You would know something of Florence Avery?"

Herbert paused, and looked inquiringly and doubtingly at Sir Miles.

"She has escaped."

"Thank God!"

"But—"

"But what?"

"She is a thing polluted."

"Liar! She would die first."

"You think so."

"I know it."

"I wish you joy of her charms, then, when you possess them; she is nought to me now. My desires are gratified."

"Monster—fiend! You have murdered her. Living you never could have succeeded. Dead—she must be dead!"

Overcome with his feelings, Herbert covered his face with his hands.

Sir Miles gazed on his rival with mixed feelings of joy and vexation.

Joy at beholding the agony of Herbert; vexation to think that, in spite of his assertions, Florence Avery was still pure and innocent.

"Are you satisfied?" sneeringly inquired Sir Miles.

At the sound of his voice Herbert started up; a change had come over him.

He was no longer the gentle and temperate being he was.

All the characteristics that had hitherto stamped him as a gentleman were gone.

In a voice husky and thick, but in tones determined and deep, he said,—

"Accursed devil! you have blasted and withered my heart. You have made me another fiend like yourself. Henceforth I will live only for revenge. Ha! ha! You shall hang, monster and murderer! You shall hang like a dog—like a dog!"

CHAPTER LXX.

THE ROYALIST AND THE COUNT—THE MESSENGER—THE COUNT'S RESOLVE—THE CAPTURE.

In a chamber of a large mansion, situate in the suburbs of Marseilles, two persons were standing in converse.

The room was furnished in princely style.

Velvet hangings descending from the cornices to the floor, effectually excluding all outward air and sound.

One of the persons in the room was of tall and commanding stature, bright, piercing eyes, and hair and whiskers in profusion.

It was the Marquis of Delanque, the chief of the Bleus, that the reader was introduced to in the Chateau du Pont.

The other was almost a youth, not so tall, nor so strongly formed as the marquis, yet bearing the same stamp of nobility about his person.

"Look you here," said the taller, "the English government have promised to send supplies and men to our assistance; they are sure to come, and with their aid we shall drive the rebels into the sea. Then where are your chances of glory and renown? I tell you, nephew, you must join our standard, and see, here is a commission, signed by the king, conferring on you the command of a troop of cavalry."

So saying the marquis drew from his bosom a piece of parchment, and handed it to his younger companion, who took it reluctantly in his hands, and commenced reading it down.

The marquis watched him narrowly.

The young man lifted up his head.

"No, uncle, I will not accept it. I am sick of the air of courts. I yearn to mingle with the sons of freedom."

"'Fore death, but you shall accept it."

And suddenly drawing a dagger from his belt, he held it menacingly, and pointing to the parchment, exclaimed,—

"Sign it, or spite of the ties of blood, I'll strike thee dead at my feet!"

"Strike, then, uncle; for I will not do as you wish me. In truth, I should prove a noble soldier to your cause were I to go against my convictions through the fear of death. No, no; kill thy sister's son if thou wilt, for join thy cause I cannot."

"'Fore heaven, a brave boy," murmured the marquis, and his arm dropped by his side.

"Well, well; perhaps you are right. I cannot find the heart to slay thee. So get thee gone ere worse enemies than thine uncle find thee."

The young Count de Leon looked up, and a glance of regret appeared in his eyes.

For in spite of the difference of political opinions that existed between them, they really possessed an affection for each other.

It is true that every hour that saw them opposed to each other had the effect of gradually lessening the affection that the ties of blood had cemented between them.

Such, indeed, are the evils that attend civil wars, and render them more horrible than the ordinary encounter of nation against nation.

"Uncle, I trust we shall never meet in the field. If it is possible, I shall petition for leave to join the army in Italy."

"I hope you may succeed. I would not have my hands stained with my kinsman's blood for a kingdom."

He turned away, and the Count de Leon prepared to take his departure.

But at that moment there came a summons at the door.

The marquis looked surprised.

"Who's there, without?"

"My lord, a messenger from the port," replied a voice without.

"Ha! say you so? Let him enter, then."

The door flew open, and a man armed and attired in the costume of the Royalists, entered.

Bowing obsequiously, he advanced towards the marquis.

"What news bring you, comrade?"

The Marquis always addressed the commonest soldier in the ranks as comrade, thus adding much to his popularity in the army.

"My lord, the English ships have arrived," replied the soldier.

"Ha! that is good. At last they are here."

And he cast a glance at his nephew to see how it affected him.

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But the count remained immoveable, apparently gazing at the ornaments around him.

"And," continued the soldier, "they encountered the French fleet two days ago, and completely routed them."

"'Fore heaven, that's good news. You may retire."

Once more the marquis and the count are alone in the apartment.

"You heard, Leon, did you not?" said the marquis.

"Yes," laconically replied the count.

"You see how hopeless their cause is now?" he asked.

"No."

"You do not?"

"No; I see nothing hopeless as yet. The sun of freedom has not risen to set yet."

"Ah! I see nothing will convince you."

"No. While there is such a thing as liberty, and hearts that pant for it, and hands to fight for it, our cause can never be hopeless."

"Well, I must away to meet these English; so farewell."

He held out his hand as he spoke.

Count de Leon took it coldly in his own.

"Farewell," he muttered, "I fear we shall meet again soon."

He turned and left the apartment.

In a little while he stood without, armed and attired for travelling.

"Ah, my uncle little thinks, with all his wisdom, that I have my gallant company within call, and that I know of his pretty messenger bound for the English camp."

A look of satisfaction crossed his features as he soliloquised thus.

"No, no; she must be intercepted, and the despatch—yes, that must be obtained."

By this time he had entered a wood that lay about a quarter of a mile from his uncle's house.

As soon as the house was hidden from his view by the foliage around him, he drew from his vest a small silver whistle, and placing it to his lips, blew a shrill note.

In a few seconds several men, armed to the teeth, emerged from the thicket and stood before the count.

"Is all well?"

"Yes, captain."

"And the travellers—have they been well watched?"

"Never been lost sight of yet, captain."

"Good! Where are they now?"

"They have stopped at a small inn near the Government Square, where they will pass the night."

"Then, to-night, we must obtain the despatch, or else they will hear of the arrival of the English fleet, whose protection they will most likely seek, and then all our plans will prove abortive."

"True, captain."

"Then you take two of the troop, and follow me; quick, there's not an instant to lose."

The man bowed acquiescence, and disappeared.

The shadow of the approaching night lay around; the hum of insects and the song of birds were hushed; but no cool and refreshing breeze relieved the sultry oppressiveness of the air.

The Count de Leon, attended by three of his company, proceeded towards the city, silently and speedily.

As they drew near to the gates, now no longer guarded, they threw aside their stealthy motions, and walked boldly and erect through the deserted streets.

They had little fear of molestation, for the town was really deserted by all but the poorer inhabitants who were left to starve.

By and by they halted before a neat and unpretending-looking hostelry.

"This is the place, captain."

"Ah, and you feel certain that the wench carries it concealed about her person?"

"Oh, yes; I overheard her promise to conceal it about her in the old chateau."

"Then we must seize the girl, and carry her off to our rendezvous, and search her at our leisure," said the count.

At that moment the door of the hostelry opened, and a young girl paused on the threshold, as if uncertain whether to quit the door or not.

"'Tis she herself," whispered the man who had acted as guide, to the count.

"Ha! is it so? By heaven, she's a lovely girl!" he exclaimed.

And for a few moments the Count de Leon gazed spell-bound on the charming contour and sweet features of the girl before him.

It was quite dark, there being neither moon, nor stars, nor lamps; and the light emitted from the interior of the inn through the open door, only served to reveal the maiden who stood in its rays, consequently she could see nought but darkness beyond.

She was about to retire within, as if satisfied with her observations without, when De Leon, not exactly liking the chance of so easy a capture to pass by, imitated the sound of some one in distress.

The girl started and turned pale, and came to the door again.

"Oh, for the love of heaven render me some help, or I perish," said Leon, in disguised and pitiful accents.

"Who are you that call for help?" cried the maiden, tremblingly. "What ails thee?"

"I'm a poor wounded soldier. I have succeeded in crawling as far as here. I am exhausted, and can go no further. Pity—pity!"

Her first impulse was to rush indoors and summon help.

But the last words were uttered in so despairing a tone, that all caution forsook her, and she stepped out into the darkness.

"Where are you?"

"Here, oh kind and pitying being."

In another instant she was seized in the rough arms of the count and his myrmidons.

A stifled shriek burst from her lips, but a gag was placed in her mouth, and dragging her forcibly along, they hurried her from the spot.

They turned from the streets, and were in the act of crossing Government Square, when, after violent and extraordinary efforts, the girl succeeded in freeing herself from the gag that well-nigh stifled her, and gave vent to loud and prolonged cries for assistance.

Her cries were fortunately heard.

And, as our readers are aware, brought Tom Starling and his comrades to her rescue.

In the meantime, the Count de Leon, ere he quitted the wood where the remainder of his troop were concealed, left orders to the effect that several of the band should meet them at the usual rendezvous in the city at midnight.

It happened, unfortunately for Tom Starling and his friends, that the inn they had entered was the identical one in which De Leon's band were to be found at midnight.

The landlord was one of the Revolutionary party, and had proved himself a zealous and ruffianly partizan in the cruel massacres of the Royalists that had taken place in the unfortunate city a short time previously.

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And on every occasion he acted as a spy in the interests of the republicans.

Consequently, when any secret expedition was on foot among the champions of liberty, his house was generally the rendezvous.

No wonder, then, that the landlord and his guests look surprised and startled at seeing the sailors enter with a wounded man, whom they immediately recognised as the Count de Leon.

The garrulity of the sailors soon enlightened them also, in a great degree, as to the circumstances that had led to such a result.

The landlord succeeded, as we are already aware, in obtaining possession of the count, and procuring attention and assistance to his hurts.

That accomplished, revenge was the next to be gained.

The ill-looking men that the woman Tom Starling had rescued noticed going in and out, were part of the count's troop, and they instantly took measures to avenge their captain.

Too well they have succeeded.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE RESCUE—THE OLD PENSIONER—MEETING BETWEEN TOM STARLING AND CARRY—HOPELESS LOVE.

Tom Starling, as he lay bound on the floor of the inn, strained every nerve to lift his head sufficiently high, in the hopes of catching sight of those who had succeeded in entering.

Would they prove friends or foes?

He had not long to wait.

Ere the frightened and scared murderers had time to prepare for defence, or flee, the door of the room opened, and a large and beautiful Newfoundland dog bounded in, and, with a bark of joy, rushed towards the insensible woman, licking her hands and face with every mark of affection and pleasure.

Almost immediately after, our old friend Bernard entered, followed by several soldiers in the uniform of the Bleus, and a female; though not so beautiful, she was of similar age and stature as the one who still lay insensible.

Rushing up to the still insensible girl, old Bernard took hold of the nerveless hand.

"My child, my sweet child, have they killed thee? Speak to me; 'tis I, thy old friend, Bernard."

And tears came in the old pensioner's eyes as he looked at the marble inanimate face that lay before him.

The female who had followed Bernard came forward, and in accents of terror and alarm exclaimed,—

"She is not dead! Oh, say she is not dead! They could not have been so cruel as to murder her."

"No, no," said Bernard, after a pause; "she is not dead. See! she breathes! Heaven be praised! Quick, girl, water! bring water!"

While the old man and his companion were endeavouring to restore to animation the unfortunate witness of the poor sailors' murder, a widely

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different scene was being enacted in the other part of the room.

The Bleus saw with horror the sight of blood before them.

At the sight of the bodies of the murdered Englishmen, a cry of rage broke from them as they rushed upon the murderers.

It was useless to resist, for the Bleus were too numerous, and the men of Count de Leon's troop were soon most ignominiously bound, while Tom Starling was quickly released.

As he stood erect, and stretched forth his stiffened limbs, he looked at his dead mates, and from them to the authors of their death, and his honest heart beat with indignation, and a feeling he could scarcely control prompted him to wreak summary vengeance on them now, but he restrained himself.

Not so with the Bleus.

The horrors of war, hardship, and suffering rendered them callous to sentiments of humanity.

Justice must be satisfied.

While Bernard and the woman were busily occupied with their own concerns, the Bleus marched out with their prisoners, followed by Tom, whose curiosity was aroused by the solemn and mysterious manner of the royalists.

They sought for the landlord, for they had determined that he should suffer with the troopers; but that astute individual had shown his discretion by disappearing in time.

They proceeded to the courtyard at the back of the house, and lighting several torches, stuck them round, so that a strange and fitful glare of light shone over the whole yard, illuminating the features of all present in such a manner, that they resembled the fiends of hell more than human beings.

The prisoners were ghastly pale.

They knew that their fate was sealed, their doom fixed.

They knew it was vain to seek to move their captors from their purpose.

There was no mercy there!

They were placed in a row.

At the word of command the Bleus formed opposite them.

"Soldiers, make ready!"

The sharp click of the triggers, as they were pulled back was the only answer.

"Present!"

"Fire!"

A loud report echoed amid the surrounding buildings as the volley was discharged.

Yells, imprecations, and groans followed, as the prisoners fell to the ground, some killed, and some only wounded.

The Bleus marched towards where they lay writhing and twisting in agony on the ground, the glare of the torches rendering their upturned and agonised faces frightful to behold.

"Finish them!" coolly commanded the officer of the Bleus.

In obedience to their commands, the Bleus fixed their bayonets, and drove them through the breasts of the wounded men on the ground.

The blood spurted out, and a few faint spasmodic struggles of the limbs, as they lay pinned to the earth by the bayonets, followed afterwards by the rigidity of death, told that all was over.

Tom Starling's messmates were avenged, and justice was satisfied.

"May I be tarred and feathered," muttered Tom to himself, as he returned to the room he had recently left, "if that sight don't make me feel qualmish like."

As he entered the room the young girl that he and his mates had rescued in the square was just recovering from her swoon.

Bernard, now that his anxiety was relieved, turned towards Tom.

"What was that firing I heard just now?" he asked.

"Oh!" replied Tom, "them mounseers have been shooting the other mounseers, that's all."

Presently the Bleus returned, dragging in the unfortunate Count de Leon, they having just discovered him in another apartment.

It was heedless cruelty, for the poor wretch was mortally wounded, and had not many minutes to live.

"And how, old gentleman," inquired Tom, addressing Bernard, "did you manage to find us out so luckily?"

"When I missed my poor child, I hurried to the Marquis Delanque, whose safe conduct I have; he sent a sergeant and troop to follow me, and, thanks to yon dog, who led us without error, we found you."

The young girl was now sufficiently restored to talk and look about her, and her eyes immediately fell on Tom Starling.

"My gallant and noble defender!" she murmured holding her hand towards him.

As she spoke, her companion turned and gazed at Tom Starling, and, as her eyes met his, she gave a faint shriek of surprise.

"Shiver my timbers if it ain't Carry!" exclaimed Tom, with surprise. "Why, what wind brought ye in these ere parts?"

Carry was so overcome that she could not utter a word.

"And little Snowdrop, where is she?" continued Tom. "Is she well and hearty?"

"Alas! I know not," said Carry, sadly. "I have not seen her since you took her away from me; but I fear she is not happy."

"Avast there, girl! Not happy? That cannot be, surely!"

Old Bernard now said it was time they were moving, for there was no safety in that part of the city.

So Carry and the other girl, who was no other than Florence, prepared to take their departure.

Bernard had heard that the English fleet was anchored off the port, and he accordingly determined to place his charges on board of the admiral's ship, and, after bidding them farewell, return to his home in Brest.

Tom, when he heard their intention, declared himself ready to escort and guard them to the port if Bernard would show the way.

In a few minutes they were ready.

The Bleus marched with them some little distance, and believing them free from any further danger, they took their leave, and Tom and the old pensioner escorted the girls the remainder of the way.

Carry leant on the arm of Tom Starling.

For a while they walked on in silence.

Carry's heart was full.

A feeling had gradually grown within her, exciting hope and fear.

Since she had forsaken her old course of life, and been freed from the wretched thraldom of Hamet, the generous, gallant, and noble figure of Tom Starling would continually rise before her, and, in spite of the fears that would sometimes recur to her, she indulged in the hope that she might, in the language of old, "find favour in his sight."

But the first surprise of their meeting showed too truly to her woman's perception that her hope was vain, her dream dispelled.

Her yearning heart read no language of love in the eyes of Tom for her.

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She thought she could see the light of the tender passion in his eyes, but it was for another.

Poor Carry!

To her the world appeared as a blank.

There was nothing she cared to live for.

Crushed with shame at her previous life, that an honourable love had revealed to her in so odious a light, she dreamed of a better future.

Now all was dark.

She had no hope this side of the grave.

CHAPTER LXVII.

ON BOARD THE FLEET—ARRIVAL OF THE PIRATE SHIP—MEETING OF HERBERT AND FLORENCE—DEATH OF SIR MILES CRESSINGHAM.

"FAREWELL, my dear, dear children!" exclaimed old Bernard, affectionately embracing Florence and Carry. "May heaven watch over thee and bless thee!"

The girls sobbed at parting with the good old pensioner.

He had been so tender, so kind, and so brave the while he had been with them, that they had learnt to love him as a father, and were deeply moved at leaving him.

But time presses, the boat waits; and after one more lingering embrace, the girls enter the boat, accompanied by Tom Starling.

Soon they stand on the deck of a British ship, and gazing towards the shore, on which they had suffered so many perils, they waved their handkerchiefs, in token of farewell towards the solitary figure of Bernard, who stood watching them.

That evening the anchors of the fleet were weighed, and the next morning they were beyond the sight of land.

They were in full sail for Spain, where they arrived just in time to take off the glorious and suffering army of Sir John Moore, who had fallen on the victorious field of Corunna.

After unheard-of perils, harassed and hemmed in on all sides, the army had retreated, under their heroic commander, before the overwhelming host under Marshal Soult, more than a hundred miles; they reached the sea.

The English ships lay off the shore and the French were behind.

To embark then was certain annihilation.

Like a lion at bay, the worn-out army of Britain turned on its foe, and, after a glorious struggle, defeated them.

Sir John Moore fell; his task was accomplished, the army was saved.

The fleet now steered for home, with their freight of wounded heroes.

Anxiously and earnestly did Florence inquire and search amid the wounded for her beloved Herbert.

But she could gain no tidings of him.

Her heart sunk within her.

Oh, if he should be among the slain; his dead body lying on the deserted shore, a prey for the vultures.

The thought was madness.

Sadly and sorrowfully she sought consolation in the society of Carry, who, poor girl, was as much in need of it herself.

About noon the next day a sail was descried steering towards them from the opposite direction.

At first it was thought to be a French ship, but as it came nearer, the Union Jack was run to the fore.

The admiral ordered the boats to be lowered, ready to board the vessel when sufficiently near, and, if she came from England, to exchange the news.

It proved to be the pirate ship, with the troops under Herbert's command.

The admiral was soon informed of all that had occurred on board the transport, and great praise was bestowed on Lieutenant Fawcett for his gallantry and courage in capturing the pirate vessel.

As soon as the troops were transferred to the different ships where their respective regiments were located, Herbert, the Marquis of Bridgnorth, and Capel Fawcett proceeded to board the admiral's ship, and pay their respects to the commander of the fleet.

They were cordially received by the admiral, who invited them to dine with him and his officers.

It was after dinner.

The evening was fine, and the stars began to shine forth as the light grew fainter.

Herbert and the Marquis were walking the deck of the admiral's ship, admiring the calm beauty of the ocean, as it glistened beneath the setting sun.

The marquis had just made Herbert his confidante, and had told how well and yet how hopelessly he loved.

He did not, however, reveal the name of the object of his affection, not deeming that of any importance.

Herbert deeply sympathised with him, and tried to persuade him from carrying out his intention of self-imposed exile.

"No, Herbert, I am resolved to become a wanderer and an alien in foreign lands, until death mercifully liberates me from the chains that enshackle me."

"But you must return to England; all the fleet are bound homewards. There is no alternative for you."

"Ah! but I shall not land. Before we reach the shores of England we are sure to meet an outward bound, and money will easily secure my transfer from this ship to another."

At that moment they met Florence and Carry, who were enjoying the cool of an evening promenade.

As they drew sufficiently near for recognition, Florence looked up.

A sudden paleness overspread her countenance.

She stretched forth her hands, and uttered a low cry of joy and surprise.

Herbert, speechless with astonishment, looked as if he hardly believed his senses; then, as the beloved voice fell upon his ear, he rushed forward and caught her in his arms, just as she was about to sink overcome to the deck.

"Joy, joy!" exclaimed Herbert, passionately. "I have found my beloved at last! Oh, heaven! I thank thee!"

And then holding her away at arm's length, he gazed into the face of the fair girl.

"Yes, 'tis the same dear face, the same truth-beaming eyes."

And again he clasped her to his bosom.

"Oh, Herbert!" murmured Florence, "I thought thee dead, and—and—"

She could say no more, joy and love overwhelmed her, and she laid her head on Herbert's shoulder, looking unutterable love into eyes that worshipped hers.

The Marquis of Bridgnorth delicately and considerately walked away, and left the lovers to their new found happiness.

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Poor Carry had turned away, and was sadly gazing on the rippling waters that was fast bearing them homeward.

"'Tis strange!" muttered the marquis; "that face haunts me. How like to Elinor it is!"

The next morning there was deep solemnity on board.

The sailors assembled in knots and conversed in whispers.

And preparations were being made for some unusual event.

It was the day appointed by the admiral for the execution of the pirates.

About eight bells, the prisoners were, with the exception of Sir Miles Cressingham, brought on deck, and arranged in a row beneath the fatal ropes that were to hoist them into eternity.

The captain of the ship, to whom the admiral had delegated the task of superintending the proceedings, then approached, and commenced to address the unfortunate and doomed men.

With stolid indifference they gazed on the preparations around them, and on the faces that watched them.

There was no sign of fear among them.

Misguided and crime-stained though they were, they had faced death too often to fear it now.

"Prisoners," commenced the captain, "you are about to expiate your crimes with death; an outraged and offended law demands justice. Found in the act of piracy on the high seas, in arms against your King and country, and warring with all mankind, you are doomed to suffer an ignominious death. Have you anything to say before the course of justice takes place?"

There was a breathless silence.

Not one spoke.

The captain gave the signal.

The ropes were adjusted round their necks.

A defiant look sparkled in their glazed eyes, and their lips trembled as if muttering a prayer.

The captain dropped his handkerchief.

It was the signal to haul the wretched culprit's up.

A suppressed murmur ran through the assembled watchers as the pirates were run up to the yard-arm.

And the next moment the writhing and struggling bodies were dangling in mid-air.

After a short period Sir Miles Cressingham was brought on deck.

He was ashy pale, and the impress of great suffering was stamped on his features.

As the suspended bodies of the pirates caught his view, a feeling of faintness struck to his heart, and a shiver ran through his frame.

When he arrived to where the captain was standing, his custodians halted, and stood on either side of him.

"Sir Miles Cressingham, behold the fate of your wretched companions, and the effects of outraging the laws," said the captain.

Sir Miles remained motionless and silent.

"The part you have played," continued the captain, "in the events that have ended in the sacrifice of life before you is infinitely worse and criminal. You, from your position and education, have no excuse or palliation for the attrocious crimes that you have been guilty of. Your doom is death; but, in consideration of your rank, the admiral has graciously permitted you to be spared the indignity of hanging; you will be shot."

The working of Sir Miles' face was fearful to look upon.

Cruel and relentless as he had been, and fearless in the prosecution of his terrible deeds, his heart died within him.

He feared to die.

Yet in that moment of terror he still thought of revenge.

"I will not die!" he shrieked; and at the same time attempted to rush towards Herbert, who was standing a few paces off; but he was promptly seized, and in spite of his struggles, oaths, and curses, borne towards the poop, where he was placed in position to receive the shots of the firing party.

"Blast ye all! I'll cheat ye yet! Herbert Mandeville, I know where thy mistress is, perishing for aid that can never come. You'd know the secret, but I die, and thou can'st not wring it from me. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Liar!" thundered Herbert. "Behold!"

At that moment Florence had come upon the deck, unaware of the terrible tragedy that was being enacted.

The sight of the suspended bodies overwhelmed her with horror, and she flew to Herbert and hid her face in his bosom.

As Sir Miles' eyes fell on the form of Florence as she rushed into Herbert's arms, he gave vent to a yell of surprise and rage.

But ere he could utter a word, the signal was given, and the volley fired that deprived Sir Miles Cressingham of life and rid the world of a monster.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

RETURN TO ENGLAND—REUBEN AND SNOWDROP—THE LOST PAPERS—RIGHTED AT LAST.

ENGLAND was reached at last.

But there was one cloud that dimmed the brightness of the joy and happiness of Herbert and his betrothed.

That was because their friend the marquis still adhered to his resolve of not landing on British soil.

They were about to enter the ship's boat, and were bidding farewell to those on board who had been kind towards them, when a despatch boat from shore hailed them.

Important despatches from the admiralty were at once conveyed to the admiral, and among them was one for the Marquis of Bridgnorth.

With eager haste the marquis tore open the envelope.

It informed him officially of the death of his wife.

He was free!

A deep sigh emanated from his bosom, and turning to Herbert and Florence, he said,—

"Dear friends, my resolution is changed. I return to London with you. God forgive me for rejoicing in the death of her I should have cherished."

"Thank heaven," said Herbert, "we shall see you happy yet."

The next morning, Herbert and Florence, accompanied by the marquis and Carry, arrived in the metropolis, and took up their quarters at one of the principal hotels.

Fortune seemed to favour them, now that the evil genius of the house was dead, for the next day the marquis, on returning from a visit to the Horse Guards, met his adored Elinor in company with her sister Maud and her husband (for the happy Maud had bestowed her hand where her heart had already strayed). Words cannot describe the joy of that meeting.

Elinor forgot the difference of their rank, in the bliss of again beholding him, who had won her young affections as a poor artist.

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But more surprises awaited them.

At the marquis's pressing invitation, they accompany him to the hotel to behold those whom he spoke of as his dearest friends, and, on being introduced to Herbert Mandervillo and Florence, Elinor and Maud, beheld their long lost and beloved sister.

The marquis was greatly astonished to find that the adored of his heart was the sister of her who was beloved by Herbert, and in whom he thought he discerned a likeness.

It was now decided that Florence should take up her abode with Maud and Elinor, till the happy day that would behold them both united in wedlock, to those who had proved so true through so many trials.

In the meantime, Reuben had been tried for murder, and Snowdrop's evidence, she being chief witness, proved him guiltless, and in spite of the clamorous party of chapel-goers, who panted for the blood of a victim, he was acquitted.

In the little room in Southwark, the widow of Spider was sitting. Beside her sat Snowdrop and Reuben.

"Now, Snowdrop," said the widow, "we've got over our troubles. Let us see what's to turn up for you."

So saying, she once more produced the mysterious papers that had been the bone of contention so long between Snowdrop's enemies.

Snowdrop smiled her thanks, and prepared to read.

Reuben, who was still the child in intellect he had always been, watched Snowdrops countenance with eager interest as she unfolded the documents.

As Snowdrop's eye wandered over the manuscript, the tears flowed fast down her cheeks.

"What is it, darling, that is upsets you so?" inquired the widow.

"My poor, injured, heartbroken mother," sobbed Snowdrop.

Reuben looked bewildered, and as if he would strike some unseen enemy.

"This paper," said Snowdrop, drying her tears, "is the history of my poor mother, and it tells me that she was the wife of Sir George Cressingham, who died abroad from, as she afterwards found out, poison administered by one of the agents of his cousin, Miles Cressingham. The unprincipled Miles Cressingham at once seized upon the estates, and proclaimed himself heir to the baronetcy, and spread the report that his cousin was never married. The consequence was that my poor mother was driven from the door of her own home, with me, an helpless infant, at her breast. All these cruel misfortunes turned her brain. Alas, my poor mother!"

"Then you are a born lady."

"This," continued Snowdrop, without heeding the interruption, holding up a piece of parchment, "is the marriage certificate of my parents, and this is the certificate of my baptism—Louise Cressingham."

"Louise!" ejaculated the widow.

"Yes, Louise."

There was a pause. Each were busy in thought and conjecture.

The widow was thinking how Snowdrop, as we shall still call her, was to regain her inheritance.

Snowdrop, on the contrary, was thinking of her persecuted mother.

"I tell you what, my dear," at length said the widow, "you must see the gentleman—the lawyer, I mean, who defended my poor boy here. He'll be able to make it all right, I daresay."

"Very well," replied Snowdrop, "We'll go now. You will come with me, will you not?"

"If you wish it, dear."

"Oh, yes."

Accordingly they sallied out, to consult the lawyer who had defended Reuben at the Old Bailey.

They found the lawyer's address, and an interview was at once granted, the documents inspected, and everything provisionally settled.

Hopeful and cheerful they quitted the abode of the lawyer, and proceeded on their return home.

They had scarcely gone a dozen yards, when a voice inquired of them the way to the Marlborough Hotel.

Something in the tones of the voice made Snowdrop look up, and her eyes met those of the questioner.

"Shiver my topsails if it arn't Snowdrop."

It was Tom Starling.

"Lord love your little heart. The sight of you sets me all abeam. And how have you been all this long time?"

"Alas!" replied Snowdrop, "I have suffered much since you took me from poor Carry."

"Avast, avast! but what was my old aunt about to let sorrow come aboard your heart."

Snowdrop told the astonished Tom all—concealing nothing.

"Well, I'm brought up all standing. Blow me if I'll take that old piratical aunt of mine in tow any more. I'll cast her adrift, that I will. So you're a born lady, are you? Why, damme, who did you say was your old villain of an uncle?"

"Sir Miles Cressingham."

"Sir Miles Cressingham!" echoed Tom. "Why, he's been shot for a pirate; he's clean dead and gone."

"Good heavens! What a retribution."

"Aye, it's true as gospel. I saw it with my own eyes. And I've come up now to see the pretty lady he tried to circumvent with his villany. She's staying at the Marlborough with her husband that is to be."

On rattled Tom, till he found he had wandered with the women almost to their home.

"Tell me, Tom," said Snowdrop, "the name of these friends you are going to see."

"Their name. Why, let me see. One was Lieutenant Mandeville, the other was the Marquis of Bridgnorth, and the lady was Miss Avery."

"Good heavens! how strange," murmured Snowdrop, "the name of Mandeville and Avery occur in some of these papers, in which an agent of Sir Miles confesses that both were plundered by nefarious means to a large extent. Moreover, that a Mr. Avery was shot, and—but, alas! there is no end to the catalogue of villany performed by this bad wicked man."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

CONCLUSION.

Tom Starling visited the Marlborough Hotel, according to an invitation from the marquis and Herbert.

He then related his accidental interview with Snowdrop, together with all she had told him about the documents she had in her possession.

Herbert ot once decided to see Snowdrop.

The result was that Snowdrop became surrounded by friends, eager and anxious to assist her to regain her lost home; and she in time became a visitor to the parsonage at Brompton, where, to her great joy, she beheld her lost and long-loved Carry.

Everything prospered.

There was no opposition to the suit of Louise

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Cressingham, and accordingly she was installed to her estate and rank in due time.

As soon as she became mistress of her wealth, she immediately restored to the Averys and Herbert the wealth that Sir Miles had so unjustly deprived them of.

Her next care was to offer to her beloved Carry a home with her as long as she lived.

But Carry refused.

She would not cloud the sunshine of all around her with her gloomy presence.

She would seek some place of retirement, where she could give up her whole soul to devotion and repentance.

At last the happy day arrived, and Herbert Mandeville and the Marquis of Bridgnorth were privately married by Maude's husband.

The reason for privacy was the apparent haste of the marquis's nuptials after so recent a bereavement.

Tom Starling was present, as also was Snowdrop and Carry, together with the two Miss Averys, who had flown to the Baroness Fitzwalter's house, but now happily weaned from courts and intrigues.

There was only one drawback to the felicity of Florence, and that was the mystery that surrounded the fate of her lost eldest sister Alice.

At the wedding breakfast, Lieutenant Fawcett contrived to be present, and paid particular attention to Adeline, while a brother officer whom he had introduced did the same to Clara.

At last the happy pair started on their honeymoon tour.

The party broke up, and Snowdrop and Carry were together for a little time at the former's house in town.

"My dear Snowdrop," said Carry, "has not all these weddings set you thinking on whom you may have to bestow your hand?"

"No, indeed, Carry; I have never thought of it."

"Then your heart is free?"

"Yes, Carry; no other than my poor mother occupies it now."

"Then there is no hope for Tom Starling?"

"Tom Starling?" echoed Snowdrop.

"Yes; he loves you; I have read it in his eyes."

"Loves me?"

"Yes, he loves you. It is hopeless, vain, is it not?"

"Oh, yes. I can never love him as a husband, though I love him as a friend."

A few days after, Carry told Tom Starling that she had divined his secret—that he loved Snowdrop.

"By old Neptune's trident, but you're right, anyhow! Who told you?" inquired the astonished Tom.

"Your own eyes."

"My eyes? Ah! I see; signal lights. But who'd ha' thought it though?"

"You must not think of her any more; your love is hopeless," said Carry.

"Is that her wish? Did she say it?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm clean cut adrift."

And the gallant sailor dashed away a tear that unbidden stole to his eyes.

Then speaking to himself,—

"Avast, Tom! you must sail through life's storm alone. Never mind, keep all snug and taut in your heart, and you'll reach the port of heaven, as the chaplain says, at last. Good bye, Carry."

Carry's heart bled for him; but he was gone.

Thus Tom and Carry went down the vale of life, solitary and alone, with no fond heart to share in weal or woe.

A few months after, the Marquis of Bridgnorth attended a drawing-room at court, and had the honour of presenting his beautiful bride to the Sovereign.

In the evening a grand ball was given at the palace, at which all the nobility were present.

Among the guests was the young Earl of Hampden, his first appearance at court since his father's death.

He had married the now amiable Alice, and with pride and love in his eyes, he led her through the magnificent saloons.

It was not long before Alice and Elinor met, and again was the cup of joy filled to overflowing.

Their remarkable and eventful career became the topic of conversation, and the story reaching the ears of His Gracious Majesty, he invited them to court.

Free from care, their faces beaming with happiness, the Six Beauties appeared before the King.

All were astonished at their loveliness, and did them homage.

So true is it that virtue reigns triumphant, even amid the gross sensuality of a court.

The gipsy Michael was sought for by Florence, and exonerated from the dark crime that hovered over him, and then placed beyond want and persecution.

Gentleman Jack was caught at last in the noose of Jack Ketch, and the wretched Lady Bess soon followed.

Tom Starling went again to sea, without seeing his aunt, Mrs. Barton, and never returned.

THE END.

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